HILLARY TALKS
CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

the weekly Standard

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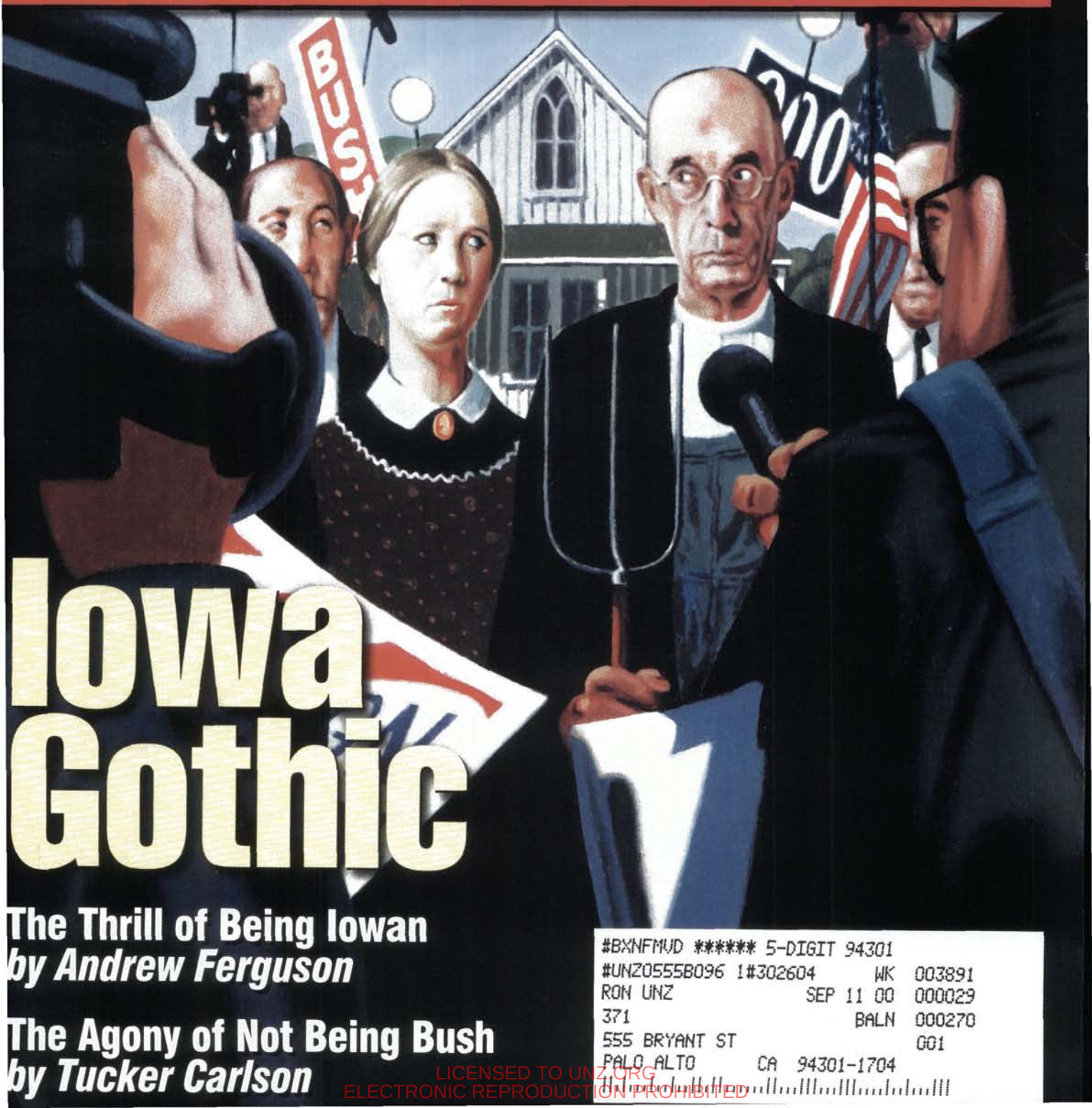

Iowa Gothic

The Thrill of Being Iowan
by Andrew Ferguson

The Agony of Not Being Bush
by Tucker Carlson

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BPA INTERNATIONAL

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Fact-checking Hillary

Who can really say if little Billy Clinton was abused, as his wife suggested in her interview published in *Talk* magazine last week? According to David Maraniss's authoritative biography of Clinton, the president's domineering grandmother "assumed that she was in control," ordering every area of his life to the point of "pushing food in his mouth if necessary." But it's hard to believe the latter ever was necessary.

The factual basis of other Hillary statements in the interview has been less scrutinized. She refers, for instance, to the period in their lives between Gennifer Flowers and Monica Lewinsky, saying, "We did have a very good stretch. Years and years of nothing." A little later, she says, "I thought this was resolved 10 years ago. I thought he had conquered it . . . but he didn't go deep enough or work hard enough."

Oops. Time to work on that chronology again. It was Hillary who agreed with her husband, during their infamous 1992 *60 Minutes* interview, that Flowers was nothing more than a "friendly acquaintance." Bill, of course, went on to deny that he'd had an affair with Flowers, who claimed she'd been involved with Clinton from the late '70s until 1989. He later put the lie to his own original defense, by admitting to Paula Jones's lawyers that he'd had a sexual encounter with Flowers—in 1977. But Hillary's admission to *Talk* would seem to put the lie to Clinton's amended lie. If it has been ten years since Bill Clinton's last woman-pleasing relapse—that would put us closer to the end of Flowers's alleged 12-year affair (1989) than Bill's single night of passion (1977).

Even if Hillary confused her time periods, it's hard to see how she could claim, without crossing her fingers, that there were "years and years of nothing." To play fair, we won't even consider the charges of the Arkansas state troopers who claimed to have procured scores of women for Clinton. If, in fact, Hillary intended to stand by her husband's under-oath contention that his tryst with Flowers was limited to 1977, then one should still be wary of Elizabeth Ward Gracen, Connie Hamzy, and Sally Perdue, all of whom claim to have had affairs or to have been propositioned by Clinton in the period between 1977 and 1989. And those are just the consensual cases (Juanita Broaddrick claims Clinton raped her in 1978).

We will not consider the hosts of Susan McDougals and other suspects who've denied having Biblical knowledge of their president. But if Hillary did intend to designate a ten-year age of innocence that came after Flowers and before Lewinsky, she'd first have to disqualify Dolly Kyle Browning (who claims her long affair with Clinton ended in 1992), Kathleen Willey (who claimed she was groped in 1993), and Paula Jones (who says she was asked to "kiss it" in 1991).

It is possible, of course, that the first lady actually believes what she's saying. For if there's one thing Hillary possesses, more than her husband's gift for embroidery or omission, it's a lethal case of naiveté. Why else would she ask, as she did in *Talk*, "Why do I have to talk about things no one else in politics does?"

In the Tank

Surely few things in life can be as frustrating for a writer as thinking that you have written a puff piece about a politician you admire, and then having it backfire. That must explain the astonishing spectacle of Lucinda Franks's desperate explanation to the *New York Times* last week that her interview with Hillary Clinton didn't say what it surely did: that in Bill Clinton's childhood can be found the explanation for his misbehavior as an adult.

As soon as Marsha Berry, Hillary's spokeswoman, disputed the content of the interview—"She did not say the president's childhood in any way caused his behavior"—Franks got on the horn to the *Times* to explain that Berry was correct and Franks's own article was wrong: The first lady "never makes a connection between his chaotic childhood—full of alcoholism, physical abuse by his stepfather toward his mother and conflict between his mother and his grandmother—and his sexual infidelities," said Franks. "Hillary Clinton never made that connection."

But here, according to Franks's article in *Talk*, is what Hillary Rodham Clinton told her: Quoth Hillary, "He has become more aware of his past and what was causing this behavior."

The Scrapbook isn't sure, then, if this means that Franks doesn't understand her interview with Hillary, didn't read the article published under her byline, or merely puts no limits on the service that she is willing to render to Hillary Clinton. Probably the last.

DeLay Tactics

Nothing would please the press more than proving that House Republican whip Tom DeLay is single-handedly running Congress behind the scenes. (Well, maybe finding that George W. Bush had done cocaine, but you get the point.) So when the staff of J.C. Watts, the chairman of the House GOP conference, leaked that DeLay was trying to take over Watts's operation, the press jumped. Supposedly, DeLay had handed out three pages of talking points and a checklist of political tasks (town hall meetings, talk radio, etc.) for members—all without notifying Watts, whose job it is to do that, or (gasp) without issuing the document on Watts's stationery.

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In truth, Watts and Pete Hoekstra of Michigan had visited DeLay earlier and asked for his help in cajoling members into communicating the GOP message. DeLay did just that, thinking he'd cleared everything with a Watts aide. But when Watts found out, he was embarrassed, complained to speaker Denny Hastert, and threatened to resign. Of course, he didn't quit. As for DeLay, no good deed goes unpunished. "The last thing DeLay wants is to take over Watts's operation," said a GOP official.

The Newest Democrat

It's hard to predict who's going to have more fun running against party-switching Long Island congressman Michael Forbes next year—his Republican opponent in the general election or whatever Democratic rival he ends up attracting in the primaries. Both sides will find a tantalizing paper trail to use against Forbes.

The former Republican was trotted out to share the spotlight with President Clinton at a Democratic press conference on Capitol Hill last week. Forbes was the only rank-and-file House Democrat who got to speak, and he was introduced affectionately by the president he once voted to impeach: "I have letters in my files," said Bill Clinton, "that Mike Forbes wrote me when he was a member of the Republican Caucus about the importance of our education agenda to the children that he represented."

One can understand the political impulse at work here, but it was probably a mistake for the president to suggest looking through the files for old Mike Forbes letters. The Scrapbook, it so happens, found quite a few in its own files, and they make for poignant reading.

There's Forbes's 1997 fund-raising letter for mentor Al D'Amato, for example: "Whoever emerges as Al's Democratic opponent, Geraldine Ferraro, Chuck Schumer, or Mark Green, their liberal spending will take us back to the Bad Old Days." Not to mention this "Very Urgent Message" to constituents earlier this very year: "The Democrats have shown their cards. They are going to throw everything they have at me in the next election because they want revenge. They want to punish me for voting my conscience on the Articles of Impeachment. If you could stand with me and give $100, $75, $50 or even $35 or $20—even if you could only give $10 it will help me show that in New York we stick by our own."

Yes, they stick by their own.

That Was Then

And speaking of old files, The Scrapbook was startled to find a clipping from President Clinton's favorite evangelical, his spiritual adviser Tony Campolo, warning that "To tie up evangelicalism with any particular presidential administration is a serious mistake. It should be obvious that if that administration becomes tarnished by scandal, then evangelicals will be harmed by association."

Then we noticed the date on the clip: It was a remnant from the bad old days of the Reagan administration—May 9, 1987—when Campolo, a leading evangelical liberal, deplored religious conservatives' allowing themselves "to be put into the hip pocket of the Reagan administration."

Campolo's own political activism goes back at least to his unsuccessful run for Congress in the early 1970s as a McGovernite Democrat. In this decade, his political enthusiasms led him to become a frequent visitor at a White House that eventually did, spectacularly, become tarnished by scandal. Perhaps to his credit, Campolo stood by the president who had called him "my good friend" in the 1994 State of the Union address. On the other hand, Campolo's insight from 12 years ago that close association with the scandal-prone can harm a reputation wasn't all wrong. His own activities may not have helped the cause of liberal evangelicalism.

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Casual

The Dinner Party

I suppose it was the time I beaned the historian Wilfred McClay with a wine cork—*blat!* right between the eyes—that I knew I'd never be one of Washington's great formal-dinner hosts. It's true he'd just claimed that if St. Ignatius Loyola were alive today, he would make a first-class director of development for some lucky university. But as my wife Lorena pointed out at some length the next day, we had given the dinner in celebration of Wilfred's new appointment to a chair in history at a college in Tennessee, and being a host carries with it certain responsibilities—one of which is to refrain from heaving things six feet down the dining-room table at your guests, even if they seem to be insulting your favorite sixteenth-century saint. She was quite certain about this as a rule of etiquette.

Then again, it may have been the time we squeezed together fourteen of Washington's evangelical writers in honor of a visit by the editor of a midwestern Christian journal. That was the night I thought I'd get conversation flowing by asking what differentiated those evangelicals who drink alcohol from those who don't. Our guests didn't actually come to blows, but there was, as I recall, some discussion of whether *Love thy neighbor* was a hard-and-fast law or merely a guideline. Lorena plumped for guideline and kicked me under the table, smiling brightly as she asked our shouting guests whether anyone would like a little more gazpacho.

But bad host or not, I keep talking my wife into cooking up her dinners—we've thrown perhaps thirty in the year and a half we've been in Washington—because, well, because it's so much fun to get eight or ten people around a table, ply them with wine and lots of food, and turn them loose to talk, and talk and talk and talk.

We've invited a Washington socialite or two (whom we bored to tears, I'm afraid), a couple of politicians (who bored us to tears), some junior members of the diplomatic corps (who knew enough to smile and not throw things, no matter how bored or boring), and an unsurprisingly large number of magazine writers and editors.

But mostly we've had intellectuals, because intellectuals, strange as it is to say, make the best dinner guests, and Washington, even stranger to say, is a great town for intellectuals. They're always passing through, with nothing to do except see their editors or testify before Congress or lecture at a think tank, and the one thing they all know how to do is talk.

Not exactly card-carrying intellectuals ourselves, my wife and I are nonetheless intellectual fellow travelers, and if you teach almost anywhere or have written a book about almost anything, you can hardly pass through D.C. without receiving a pressing invitation to dine with us.

Of course, things don't always turn out as we plan. There was the professor from Boston, famed for the relentless moral seriousness of his thought, who spent the evening happily talking gibberish with our 18-month-old daughter.

And then there was the Englishman who used an entire dinner to tell us about each of the books he'd written. About each chapter in each of the books he'd written. About why each reviewer of each of the books he'd written had misunderstood each chapter in each of the books he'd written. Lorena insists that the meal can't really have dragged on much more than 22 or 23 hours.

One summer barbecue, planned for ten couples, began falling apart when the first cancellation came late on the afternoon of the day before. By the time the charcoal was lit, we were down to three guests, staring forlornly at one another over the mounds of potato salad. (Something the socialites, politicians, and diplomats are better at than the intellectuals is reading their calendars.)

But the absences were made up for at a fancier dinner the following week. One guest decided to bring along a friend; a footloose professor from California dropped by to see if we were doing anything that evening; and a poet and his wife, getting the date wrong by just seven days, showed up in shorts and sandals for the barbecue. Lorena sent me running down the block to the convenience store (I don't really mind paying $5.75 for a pint of cream in an emergency) and thinned the vichyssoise until it tasted like little more than cold milk with chives sprinkled on top.

But the wine was good, and the rest of the food kept coming and coming, and the talk rolled on, louder and louder. And then, about eleven o'clock—in the middle, as I remember, of an argument about who should have gone to jail in the Teapot Dome scandal of the 1920s—one guest lobbed a roll at another, just to get his attention. That's when I knew at least one Washington dinner had gone down well.

J. Bottum

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Madeleine's Malevolence

My compliments to Matthew Rees for his excellent investigative piece on the State Department's illegal retaliation against Linda Shenwick ("Madeleine Albright's Vendetta," August 2). As a foreign policy aide to U.S. senator Rod Grams from 1995-1997, I worked closely with Shenwick, who was simply the most professional and capable Clinton administration employee I met during six years in Washington.

While I witnessed a number of hostile actions against Shenwick by State Department officials, one is particularly memorable. During a 1997 trip to the U.N. by a bipartisan congressional staff delegation preparing to draft U.N. reform legislation, Albright's former deputy at the U.S. Mission, Ambassador Edward "Skip" Gnehm, led a ridiculous effort to prevent us from even speaking to Shenwick. Since this occurred on Bill Richardson's first day as the new ambassador to the U.N., one can only assume Gnehm was carrying out marching orders from his previous boss, received either before or after her ascent to the top position at State.

How reassuring it is to learn that in the middle of this year's Kosovo crisis and the scandal of China stealing our nuclear secrets, the secretary of state found time to dictate to the secretary of energy that a top priority was the removal of an outstanding civil servant.

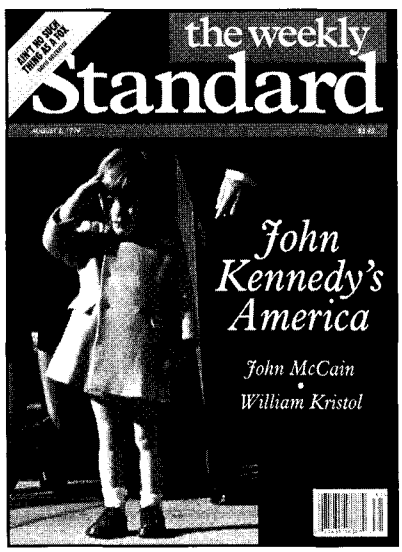
Faced with Republican initiatives to "shrink the bureaucracy," the State Department has long complained about personnel shortages. It appears Secretary Albright has come up with a solution: Cut the most dedicated and responsible employees first!

MORGAN BROWN
EDINA, MN

The sort of orchestrated attacks made against career civil servant Linda Shenwick have become increasingly common in the State Department of the 1990s. The true legacy of the incumbent administration may be its record of savagery towards professional civil servants.

In my case, I was serving as a career Foreign Service officer in Saudi Arabia, when I became aware of a gamut of institutional financial, fiscal, and human rights violations in the U.S. Mission's offices. I reported my findings (I am a trained auditor and investigator) to the Inspector General's office, which indicated it could not accept reports of waste, fraud, and abuse of authority involving "political issues." The definition of "political" in the State Department is infinitely elastic and its employment is a sure sign of obfuscation.

After waiting nearly two years, I had received no response from the State Department. So I took my reports to the FBI and the U.S. Civil Rights Commission. Then, on April 21, 1995, I was locked out of my State Department office in Washington, D.C. I also began



to meet other abused employees, including four Foreign Service officers and one other U.S. employee, all whistleblowers from the same overseas post (Jeddah, Saudi Arabia), whose careers had been abruptly terminated. No doubt a thorough investigation would reveal scores of similar cases in other State Department posts around the world.

Regarding my lockout in 1995, Idaho senator Larry Craig referred to it in October 1998 as "persecution" and "unconscionable." These words sound much like the ones Sen. Grassley used in referring to Linda Shenwick's experiences.

TIMOTHY N. HUNTER
PALMETTO BEACH, FL

Feminism, Family Style

I am pleased that in her review of my book *Ceasefire: Why Women and Men Must Join Forces to Achieve True Equality*, Danielle Crittenden commends me for using data accurately, viewing women as "equal participants in a free, democratic society," and making no special pleas for women ("The Cultural Contradictions of Feminism," July 19). If Crittenden nonetheless finds my belief that men and women should be able to choose any mix of traditional and egalitarian family roles to be as "utopian" as Germaine Greer's gender separatism, that's a matter of opinion. But regrettably, her antipathy toward my insufficiently traditionalist views has led her in some instances to misrepresent my arguments.

It is strange that Crittenden should criticize me for slighting children, since I have a chapter on work-family conflicts and another on parenthood and divorce. Far from suggesting that kids can be left in day care ten or twelve hours a day, I stress that "people who allow their children to be shortchanged by their career ambitions *should* be censured," and that most employed mothers (and many fathers) make plenty of compromises. The problem, I argue, is with the false dichotomy between staying home and working twelve-hour days.

Crittenden mocks my claim that "two careers need not spell the death of healthy family life," suggesting that what's healthy for the adults may not be so for the children. She neglects to mention that I give examples focused on children's well-being: For instance, dual-income parents spend as much time interacting with school-age kids as do parents in one-earner families (partly because of greater father involvement), and may spend *more* time helping them with homework; employed mothers also tend to be more involved in their children's schools. I also review extensive evidence that maternal employment generally does not hurt preschool children.

Most baffling, Crittenden contends that the question, "Can we hammer out a contract that respects physical differences but doesn't victimize men or women?" exposes my "deep-down belief that marriage and motherhood do victimize women." The dubious logic

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of this interpretation aside, there is no such line in *Ceasefire*. What I ask is, "Can a culture torn between traditional chivalry, neofeminist paternalism, and equality hammer out a social contract that respects physical differences between the sexes without victimizing men or infantilizing women?" This passage has nothing to do with marriage or motherhood; it addresses the need to recognize that women sometimes require the protection of men's greater strength, without insisting that women's lives be always saved at men's expense or relegating women to passive dependence. Crittenden undoubtedly regards my concerns about victimizing men and infantilizing women as amusingly wrongheaded. But it would be nice, at least, to be criticized for things I actually said.

CATHY YOUNG
MIDDLETOWN, NJ

LOST IN SPACE

Thirty years after the achievement and promise of the Apollo program, it would be hard to argue that we have met in space the lofty expectations that the moon landings raised ("Thirty Years of Ineptitude," July 26). But Robert G. Oler, Richard Kolker, and Mark Whittington would have your readers believe that NASA has accomplished little over the last 30 years, and that the blame rests solely with the space agency. NASA critics have been vocal in the past, but I have never read a more harsh and one-sided attack. The authors conveniently omitted NASA's many successes. They also failed to describe the history of the space shuttle's development, and did not place NASA in the context of how federal agencies operate under Congress.

Following the last moon landing, NASA faced reduced budgets and an increasingly hostile Congress. Soon, many of the talented Americans who worked for NASA and helped achieve President Kennedy's goal of reaching the moon were confronted with their agency's lack of a clear mission. The space shuttle program offered a new beginning: Design a reusable spacecraft that would reduce the costs of placing payloads into orbit. Here is where NASA's success with Apollo worked against them. While NASA did not have a blank check during Apollo, they had enough funding to do the job. But Congress placed the space shuttle under a shoestring budget.

While Congress might have thought it was doing taxpayers a favor, this type of funding failed to recognize the difficulty of developing new technologies such as the space shuttle. Problems do occur, and the constant budget constraints placed upon NASA produced a shuttle that was much more expensive and less capable than originally planned. Was the initial operating capability oversold? Yes. But that does not diminish the fact that the shuttle is a remarkable technological achievement which has carried out many successful missions.

Unfortunately, the development of the International Space Station has mirrored the development of the shuttle. Constant budget constraints and yearly battles to justify its existence have forced changes in scope and design that have produced a more expensive and less capable product than expected. And NASA must shoulder some of the responsibility for this. But to call the agency "inept" disregards history and is devoid of reality. Along with the space shuttle's success, the Hubble Space Telescope and NASA's robotic exploration of the solar system have yielded great scientific results.

As for the future, I agree with the authors that the real promise of space lies with private enterprise. We must define clear goals in space and have the commitment to achieve them. However, space travel remains a difficult and expensive proposition. As taxpayers, we can justify the expense of space in terms of national prestige and technological and scientific advancement. Shareholders, on the other hand, demand a return on their investment. So if we are to remain a space-faring people, NASA and the government must, for the time being, remain a partner.

BURTON DICHT
DANBURY, CT

CRAVING TORQUE

Regarding Joseph Epstein's observations on his new Jaguar S-Type ("Confessions of a Craven Materialist," August 2), I am reminded of slashing through an English roundabout aboard an Aston Martin with a wild New Zealander named Bill Gavin. As Gavin muscled various Austins, Vauxhalls, and Ford Zephyrs onto the verge, he said, "Never forget that rank has its privilege." So too should Epstein be reminded of Zero Mostel's wisdom in the epic Mel Brooks film *The Producers*, when he yelled to the driver of a white Rolls Royce limo, "If you've got it baby, flaunt it!"

I only wish Epstein had gone for the four-liter engine with 41 more horsepower. Then he'd be a real player in the spotlight Grand Prix. In cars as in life, there is no substitute for cubic inches.

BROCK YATES
ANN ARBOR, MI

Bravo to Joseph Epstein. It's refreshing to read a person's tortured but honest admission to having lusted after and purchased a sensuous material object. This contrasts sharply with an ancient column written by that professional commoner Mary McGrory when she bought her first $70,000 Mercedes. I don't have the column for reference, but it went something like this:

She needed a new car and one car is just like another and she didn't know anything about them and she had heard Mercedes were good cars and she just happened to be in the neighborhood of a Mercedes dealership and what the heck she didn't have time to look elsewhere and it was getting late and gee it's worth $55,000 not to have to spend time shopping. She came close to saying the Mercedes followed her home, so she just *had* to buy it. What could a person do?

JOHN H. FOX
TULLAHOMA, TN

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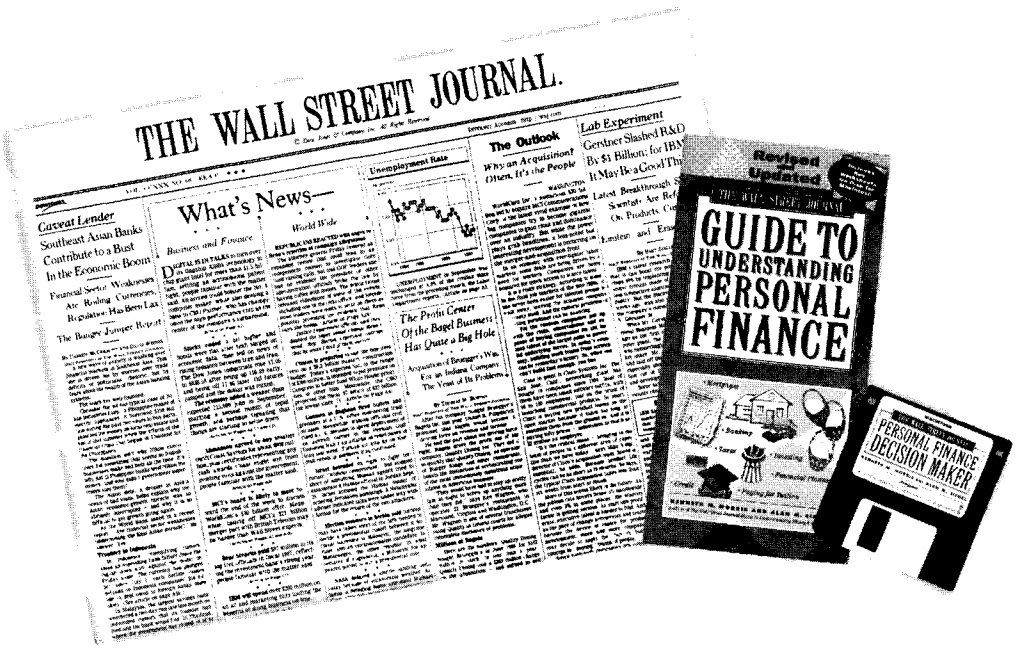

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the weekly Standard

PEACE THROUGH STRENGTH

Last week, the Chinese navy seized a Taiwanese freighter carrying provisions to Taiwanese soldiers stationed on the tiny Taiwanese island of Matsu a few miles off the coast of the Chinese mainland. Meanwhile, China was launching military aircraft on hundreds of sorties over the Taiwan Strait, test-firing a ground-to-ground ballistic missile with a range of 5,000 miles, and conducting military exercises in Fujian Province, directly across the hundred miles of water that separate China from Taiwan.

Journalists and China watchers have written these actions off as the usual Chinese bluster, provoked by Taiwan president Lee Teng-hui's declaration that China and Taiwan must negotiate as one state to another. China, they say, while angry about Lee's statements, is nonetheless trying to repair relations with the United States. For evidence, they point to China's apparent willingness to accept, sort of, President Clinton's profuse apologies for the accidental bombing of China's embassy in Belgrade. They note that China seems to have agreed, sort of, to resume talks on China's entry into the World Trade Organization later this year, and that Chinese president Jiang Zemin seems willing, sort of, to meet with President Clinton in September. Our esteemed China experts are hoping that China, in the interest of preserving U.S.-China relations, will not step up the military confrontation with Taiwan. The Clinton administration, or at least most of the Clinton administration, seems to be operating on the basis of this hope as well.

This hopefulness is dangerously misguided. The current Chinese military activities may not be mere gestures designed to intimidate Taiwan (and us). They may well be the opening phase of a serious military confrontation, one that could culminate in the coming weeks or months in some form of attack—probably not on Taiwan itself but against the tiny islands of Matsu or Kinmen (formerly known as Quemoy).

Here is the logic of such a scenario:

(1) President Lee has made a declaration regarding Taiwan's status that the Chinese government regards as unacceptable. If allowed to stand, Chinese leaders believe, Lee's position locks Taiwan onto a path which, if it does not lead to outright independence, nevertheless virtually rules out progress toward reunification until, as Lee insists, China becomes a democracy—that is, when the current dictatorship is supplanted. If Chinese leaders do not compel Lee to retreat, they will be acknowledging that their long-proclaimed goal of reacquiring Taiwan—sooner rather than later—is no longer attainable. For Jiang Zemin, given the pressures from the Chinese military and other nationalist forces within his government, and given the internal crisis brewing over China's ailing economy, such an admission could mark the end of his presidency.

(2) The Clinton administration, probably unwittingly, has given a yellow light to the Chinese to take some kind of action. Clinton officials have declared that the United States is in fundamental agreement with Beijing's position that Lee's statements are unacceptable and provocative. Publicly and privately, Clinton officials have given Lee a firm dressing down. They have suspended talks about improving Taiwan's defenses. And they delayed a promised sale of defensive weapons to Taiwan, until Republicans in Congress forced the administration to back down and go ahead with the sale.

But the administration's pressure on Lee has not worked. Lee is not buckling. Chinese leaders may well have concluded, therefore, that it is now their turn to increase the pressure on Lee. And they may have concluded further that the Clinton administration will be in a poor position to protest if they do. Sure, the administration has warned *both* sides against military action. But since the Clinton administration officially agrees that Lee's statements were provocative, how much can it really

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complain if China is provoked into action? As the Chinese see it, not much.

(3) The last time China responded to a "provocation" by Lee was in 1995, when Lee had the temerity to give a speech at his alma mater, Cornell University, while on a private visit to the United States. China conducted "tests" of its ballistic missiles off the coast of Taiwan in the summer of 1995 and then did so again, in a much more threatening manner, in the spring of 1996 in an attempt to intimidate Taiwanese voters in elections that year.

Lee's most recent statements are far more significant than his trip to Cornell University. Can the Chinese respond this time with a *smaller* show of force than they made in 1995 and 1996? Not if they want to maintain credibility for their position on Taiwan. Indeed, the Chinese may well believe that even another ballistic missile exercise would be insufficient in the present crisis. After all, the missile firings did not work in 1996. The Taiwanese people were not dissuaded from supporting Lee and his agenda for greater independence. Clearly, if the Chinese leadership wants to make a strong statement this time, one that will really frighten the Taiwanese electorate before it goes to the polls to elect a new president next March, then it will have to undertake a military action that goes beyond missile tests.

What might such an action entail? China does not now have the capability to launch a full-scale invasion of Taiwan, or so we are assured by China watchers and Pentagon officials. But it does have more than enough capability to invade and seize Matsu or Kinmen, both of which are rather lightly defended by garrisons of a few thousand troops. It could launch missile strikes against them. Or it might simply set up a naval blockade around the islands.

Any of these options is plausible, but the last one strikes us as potentially most attractive to the Chinese. Without firing a shot, the Chinese could put Taiwan and, more important, the United States in a very difficult position. China would have committed an act of aggression against Taiwan, placing Taiwanese forces on Matsu or Kinmen under threat of starvation. If Lee did nothing, he would be humiliated and the Taiwanese people might become convinced that he had taken them down an unacceptably perilous path. Under such circumstances, they might well vote for a more accommodating Taiwanese leader next March, if only to have the blockade lifted. So Lee would presumably try to break the blockade. But would he begin such an action, which would mean firing the first shot in a war with China, without the support of the United States? And could he, in fact, succeed in such an effort without assistance from the U.S. Navy?

A blockade of Matsu or Kinmen would present the Clinton administration with this choice: Either send the Seventh Fleet to break the blockade, or acquiesce in Chinese aggression against Taiwan and accept the consequences of allowing China to set such a precedent, with all it would mean both for the future of Taiwan and for the U.S. position in East Asia generally. (One can only imagine what Japan would make of a U.S. failure to respond.)

We would hope that the administration would choose the first course. But we strongly suspect, as may the Chinese, that the administration would back down and desperately seek a negotiated solution to the crisis. That would mean a victory for China. The Chinese leaders would have punished and humiliated Lee, driven a wedge between the United States and Taiwan, and demonstrated to the Taiwanese people, to the other nations of East Asia, and to the world, that the United States could not be relied upon to defend Taiwan against Chinese attack.

Nor is there any inconsistency between such a Chinese plan and China's current attempts to make nice with the Clinton administration. The fact that China and the United States would be continuing to talk about China's entry into the WTO, that President Clinton and President Jiang would be meeting, and that relations between Beijing and Washington would appear in all other respects to be on the mend would only make it more likely that the Clinton administration would refrain from decisive action that might disrupt this "progress." And it would reinforce the point the Chinese want to make: that the United States should care, and does care, more about preserving good ties with China than about defending Taiwan.

We hope we are wrong. We hope the Chinese seizure of the Taiwanese freighter is not, in fact, the first step toward a total blockade. But the scenario we have outlined seems sufficiently plausible to require immediate action by the American government. To avoid the Hobson's choice a Chinese blockade or attack on Matsu or Kinmen might present, the United States must now embark on a firm policy of deterrence. The president should declare unequivocally that the United States will defend Taiwan against any form of aggression by China. Naval forces should be sent to the region to put force behind such a statement. We can engage in a scholastic debate about our misguided "One China" policy later. Right now, we need to act boldly to preserve the peace.

—William Kristol and Robert Kagan, for the Editors

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HILLARY CLINTON, PSYCHOANALYST

by Christopher Caldwell

DURING THE JANUARY 1998 INTERVIEW in which Hillary Clinton became the first American politician since Joe McCarthy to link the words "vast" and "conspiracy" in a single sentence, there occurred a little-remembered exchange on the Monica Lewinsky affair. NBC's Matt Lauer asked, "If an American president had an adulterous liaison in the White House and lied to cover it up, should the American people ask for his resignation?"

After some hedging, Hillary replied, "Well, if all that were proven true, I think that would be a very serious offense. That is not going to be proven true. I think we're going to find some other things. And I think that when all of this is put into context, and we really look at the people involved here, look at their motivations and look at their backgrounds, look at their past behavior, some folks are going to have a lot to answer for."

Who knew that Hillary was referring to her husband's grandmother! It was at her doorstep that Hillary seemed to be laying the blame for Bill's serial adultery, when she told journalist Lucinda Franks in the debut issue of *Talk* magazine, "He was so young, barely four, when he was scarred by abuse that he can't even take it out and look at it. There was a terrible conflict between his mother and grandmother."

HILLARY HAD A CHOICE: LOOK LIKE A TYPICAL MARTYR-WIFE OR LOOK LIKE A MACHIAVELLIAN SCHEMER RIDING BILL'S COATTAILS.

The press has spent the past week debating two questions: (1) What happened to Bill Clinton at age 4? Was it abuse or not, and if so, what kind? (2) What is the nature of the "scarring" that has resulted? Is the president a "sex addict"? Since neither is a welcome topic for the Clintons, it's worth asking what on earth Hillary thought she was doing in raising the subject.

Probably, Hillary assumed that, with last January's political exoneration by the Senate already in the bag, a parallel moral exoneration was there for the asking. If so, she misjudged. "In Christian theology," Hillary explained, "there are sins of weakness and sins of malice." But you needn't have thought the president's dalliance and lying were impeachable offenses—I didn't—to realize that the sins he stood accused of were hardly sins of "weakness." No: They were sins of high-handed tyranny. Enlisting a powerful man to spend weeks hunting down a job for an ex-mistress, bullying your secretary into misrepresenting what she saw, lying in court . . . that's not the modus operandi of a shrinking violet. And those who believe the worst unproved allegations against Clinton (e.g. that he raped Juanita Broaddrick) and against the less savory members of his enforcement team (e.g. that they killed Kathleen Willey's cat) do not chalk these sins up to diffidence, low self-esteem, or other milquetoastian flaws. "Abuse of power"—for which the president was nearly impeached in the House of Representatives—is not legalese for "To Err Is Human."

If Hillary's theology was flawed, her sense of psycho-dynamics was incoherent. "A psychologist once told me," she said, "that for a boy, being in the middle of a conflict between two women is the worst possible situation. There is always the desire to please each one." This outburst of pop psychology provoked outright laughter. Jay Leno said, "Now, men—men, please, don't try these lines at home, okay? . . . You thought O. J. had the lamest alibi in history?"

That was just the beginning. Not only was the link between the president's psychological development and his Oval Office satyriasis received with snickering scorn. It also undermined the Clintons' claim—repeated in policy contexts from welfare reform to job-retraining—to stand for "personal responsibility." So the first lady, in mid-listening tour in upstate New York, quickly backtracked, spinning her own sob story. "I am," she said, "a very strong proponent and believer in personal responsibility." So is her spokeswoman Marsha Berry, who added that Hillary "did not say the president's childhood in any way caused his behavior, nor does she believe that. I think she was basically stating some feelings about his childhood, but that they do not excuse his behavior."

Just to muddy the waters, James Carville offered a $100,000 reward for anyone who could produce evidence that Hillary had linked the abuse to Clinton's adult misbehavior. That's exactly what she was doing, of course. What else could she have meant when she said the president "has become more aware of his past and what was causing this behavior"? Carville, as usual, was insisting on a standard of nit-picking literalism. But that wasn't helpful to Hillary, either. Because once you adopt that standard, many of the face-value statements she gave to Franks became as unparseable as her

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Fred Harper

husband's notorious averral to Jim Lehrer that "there is no improper relationship" with Monica Lewinsky. When Franks asked Hillary about her feelings towards Bill, she replied, "We have love." Whether they're *in* love, or whether she loves *him* is all a matter of what the definition of the word "have" is.

Not that the president didn't have it tough as a boy. According to David Maraniss's biography *First in His Class*, Clinton's maternal grandmother Edith Cassidy was impressive in many ways. She taught herself nursing through a correspondence course—and taught young Bill Clinton, for whom she was responsible much of the time, to read. She was also "independent" and "headstrong" (as we today describe women who are mean, selfish, capricious, and unreasonable), "a yeller and a thrower," as Maraniss puts it, given to beating her children and grandchildren, always screaming at her philandering husband, and fond of thrashing her daughter with a whip.

There's a lot to be said about Bill Clinton's upbringing, like: *It produced an extremely tough cookie, whom you mess with at your peril.* But that's not what Hillary was saying. Hillary was talking about child abuse. The week the story broke, she was visiting Elmira, New York, the birthplace of Healthy Families, an anti-child-abuse "home-visitation" project that is a staple of her stump oratory and the centerpiece of her idea of positive social change. Healthy Families is a government surveillance program for "at risk"—i.e., poor—families, and Hillary's visit left her in an awkward position. On the one hand, child abuse is the polestar, the ne plus ultra, of the evils her vision of government means to correct. On the other hand, if her story was correct, she had been covering up a secret history of child abuse in her own family. Soon the White House was backing off the abuse claim altogether. Within 48 hours, Joe Lockhart was insisting the abuse of young Bill Clinton was "psychological, not physical." In other words, it was not so much abuse as what earlier generations of American parents called discipline.

Lockhart, like Carville, missed the point. What made the *Talk* article most damaging was not the hints that Clinton had been abused, or that such abuse had had any effect on his life. It was Hillary's contention—the more damaging because she seemed not to realize she was making it—that her husband was a sex addict. "He's responsible for his own behavior, whether I'm there or 100 miles away," she said. "You have the confrontation with the person, and then it is their responsibility, whether it's gambling, drinking, or whatever." This is a description of what's called in the addiction

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industry an intervention ("You have the confrontation with the person . . ."). But it also links his behavior to two very different vices that, if taken to excess, routinely get classed as addictions. It is here that her statement "He has become more aware of his past and what was causing this behavior" arose as the most damaging one in the article. Non-addicted people just behave (or misbehave); they don't have things "causing their behavior."

You now have a political catastrophe on your hands. Because to call someone an addict is to call him, literally, irresponsible. If a heroin addict would give away his mother's engagement ring for a fix, if a gambling addict would risk his house on the roll of the dice, wouldn't a sex addict trade nuclear secrets for a romp in the sack?

Alarmingly, Franks then elaborated, "Public office has prevented the president from seeking therapy, but friends told me they expect him to after leaving the Oval Office." Whoa, Dobbin! Therapy—particularly if we're to believe the impromptu lecture series Tipper Gore has offered the nation in recent months—is a strictly *medical* issue. It's a way of treating something that's wrong. Either the president needs therapy or he doesn't. It's optional only if you don't care whether your problem is fixed or not. In this case, it's optional only if we don't care if the president is able to act responsibly at the most basic level—or not.

What accounts for Hillary's clumsy deployment of the abuse excuse? Mrs. Clinton, planning a run for office, must have felt trapped between two constituencies. She had to choose between looking like a traditional martyr-wife who baked cookies and stood by her man, and a Machiavellian schemer who was suffering her husband's male piggery just to ride his coattails. Neither was satisfactory, of course, so she tried to use abuse and addiction to find a middle way. Her husband's sex addiction would heighten the martyrdom that had won her so much adulation from traditional wives; and his childhood abuse would turn him into a victim, excusing (in the eyes of feminists) her most un-assertive loyalty and making her look a bit less like a doormat.

What she didn't anticipate was that the idea of an addict in the Oval Office would scare the country out of its wits. If Hillary couldn't see that, it is because she is anchored in ideology, not pragmatism. This, after all, is the woman who, when looking for a Washington sinecure to give her Arkansas cronies, came up with a really bright idea: *Let's fire the people in the travel office, who are friends with, and make their living doing favors for, the powerful journalists who distrust us.* When Paula Jones came forward with her sexual-harassment lawsuit, Hillary had another bright idea: *Don't settle out of court under any circumstances; how likely is it, after all, that my husband would make an "unwanted sexual advance"?* Now, on the eve of her first political campaign, she has done it again.

Franks tells us early in the article that Hillary has "always regarded Washington with suspicion." That's wrong. Perhaps she should, but Hillary doesn't hate Washington and its ways. She's just bad at them.

Christopher Caldwell is a senior writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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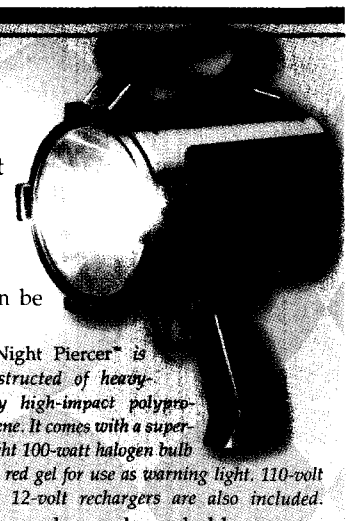

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A Modest Tort Proposal

by Jay Lefkowitz

"LOTTO JUSTICE" has struck again. Last month, a Los Angeles jury required General Motors to pay a badly burned family of five and their traveling companion $4.9 billion—the largest personal injury award in history. That's enough money to place all six of the plaintiffs *and* their contingency fee lawyers near the top of any list of the world's richest people. The tragic fire ignited when a drunk driver rammed their 14-year-old Malibu from behind at close to 70 miles per hour as the family drove home from church.

While legal commentators expect that this award, like most of its size, will fail to withstand the test of appellate review, the Los Angeles verdict is a billboard-sized reminder that our tort law system has run amok. After all, despite the burns suffered by the plaintiffs, the supposedly defective Malibu was designed so sturdily that all six of its occupants survived the enormous impact of the crash. Nevertheless, the jury awarded damages that are far greater than General Motors's profits for all of last year. The jurors clearly focused on the plaintiffs' injuries. But did they also consider the lives of the hundreds of thousands of General Motors employees that would be devastated if the company were to go out of business or have to curtail its operations? And what about the loss of competitiveness and tax revenues that will result if General Motors has to pay billions of tax-free dollars to the plaintiffs instead of investing that same money in safety research or new vehicle plants?

NO LOBBY, THE NRA INCLUDED, IS MORE POWERFUL TODAY THAN THE TRIAL LAWYERS—WHO ARE INVESTING THEIR TOBACCO-SUIT WEALTH IN POLITICS.

While it may be tempting to blame the outcome of this trial on yet another out-of-control California jury, jurors do not operate in a vacuum. Most significantly, they react to the evidence the judge lets them see, and they ignore the evidence they cannot see. In this case, by admitting into evidence a series of documents that most other courts have deemed irrelevant and inadmissible, the trial judge allowed the plaintiffs' lawyers to weave a fictitious but enticing conspiracy theory. The plaintiffs contended that General Motors could have designed a safer fuel tank for the Malibu at a marginal cost of only $8.59 per vehicle, but chose not to do so because it had a corporate policy of not spending more than $2.40 per vehicle to improve fuel system design. The plaintiffs pursued this fiction despite the absence of a single witness to confirm it and even though some of the documents on which they relied proved that General Motors had tested the plaintiffs' alternative design and considered it less safe.

Equally important was the evidence the judge prevented General Motors from presenting in court. For example, the judge refused to let the jury know either that the driver of the car that crashed into the Malibu had a blood alcohol level of two-and-one-half times the legal limit or that a passenger in the Malibu who blocked exit from the vehicle after the crash also was intoxicated and tested positive for cocaine. The court also barred any statistical evidence of the safety history of the Malibu, even though the Malibu compared favorably with similar models. The judge even prohibited General Motors from showing the jury that the alternative fuel system design suggested by the plaintiffs was actually used on a production vehicle that failed a government safety test. Thus, the judge not only permitted the plaintiffs to manufacture a case based on innuendo instead of hard evidence, but then deprived General Motors of the opportunity to defend the vehicle that was under attack.

While these rulings by the judge certainly influenced the jury's verdict, this case also demonstrates two structural problems with product liability law today. First, the verdict was the result of a legal system that regularly forces companies to defend products that meet federally mandated safety standards. This is a form of double jeopardy. Second, the case reflects the advantage plaintiffs have when they sue in their own state courts an out-of-state company, because jurors see the plaintiffs as members of their own community, while they view a large out-of-state company as a rich stranger to whom they feel no connection.

Tort reformers hope that the enormity of this verdict will reinvigorate their agenda just as the Littleton massacre has precipitated calls for tough new gun-control measures. But no lobby, the NRA included, is more powerful today than the trial lawyers—who are investing their tobacco-litigation fortunes in political campaigns to maintain their positions of power. If tort reform is to have a chance, its advocates will have to stop pursuing pie-in-the-sky proposals such as banning contingency fees and requiring the losing party to pay his opponent's legal fees, and instead target more moderate goals. Two proposals in particular—one to eliminate the double jeopardy aspect of lawsuits

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over regulated products, and the other to reduce the typical plaintiff's home court advantage—merit serious consideration.

• *Safe harbors for products that comply with federal safety standards*: Agencies like the Food and Drug Administration, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) have enormous power to regulate their respective industries, including the power to ban the sale of certain products, order product recalls, and levy fines. And these agencies do not hesitate to wield their power. For example, from 1990 to 1999, NHTSA ordered hundreds of recalls of motor vehicles based on determinations that those vehicles were not safe. With such heavy government oversight and regulation, there is no reason to expose manufacturers to rearguard attacks against products that comply with government safety standards. A modest reform would be a law mandating that courts apply a heavy presumption that any product in compliance with applicable safety standards is not defective, and that in any event, manufacturers of such products may not be found liable for punitive damages.

• *Expanded access to federal courts*. Today, a plaintiff can sue a manufacturer in a state court almost anywhere it conducts business, but a defendant can only remove a case to federal court if no other defendant is a citizen of the same state as a plaintiff. To keep corporate defendants out of federal court, plaintiffs often add defendants to a lawsuit solely because these nominal defendants reside in the same state as the plaintiff. Because lifetime tenure makes federal judges immune to the hometown pressures of reelection campaigns, federal courts usually are more predictable forums than state courts for the resolution of product liability lawsuits. A second modest reform would be to permit the defendant to remove to federal court any case in which more than $1 million in damages is sought.

Both of these proposals would promote predictability in product liability litigation, while at the same time preserving plaintiffs' rights. For example, if a product really were defective in the sense that it did not work as intended or did not comply with federal safety standards, a large damages award would remain a possibility. Only if a manufacturer complied with a specific government safety standard would the manufacturer be insulated from the threat of punitive damages, and perhaps from any liability. Likewise, while expanding access to federal courts would help level the playing field on which lawsuits are fought, it would not bar the courthouse door to a single plaintiff.

Perhaps the Los Angeles verdict will spark a public outcry for tort reform. If it does, and if the reformers want a reasonable chance of passing serious reforms, these two proposals are a good place to start.

Jay Lefkowitz is a commercial and appellate lawyer in Washington, D.C. Although he was not involved in the recently completed Los Angeles trial, he represents General Motors in numerous cases.

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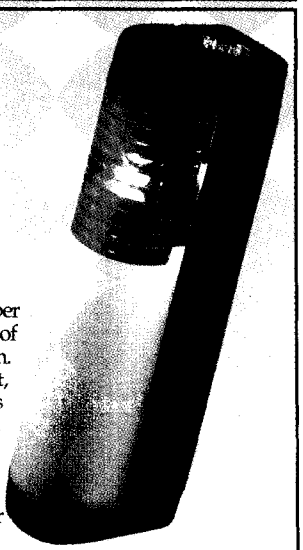

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Tobacco Railroad

by Matthew Rees

On June 17, 1998, President Clinton made an unscheduled appearance in the White House briefing room to attack senators who had blocked a comprehensive anti-tobacco bill earlier that day. The president said he'd been "working for three years now to protect our children from the dangers of tobacco." Then he issued a warning: "I want the tobacco lobby and its allies on Capitol Hill to know that from my point of view, the battle is far from over."

Indeed, the "battle" is about to be joined on a new front. On the president's orders, the Justice Department is preparing to sue the tobacco companies, seeking to hold them liable for increased Medicare costs stemming from smoking-related illnesses. The suit, which may be filed within a few weeks, will be one of the largest civil matters ever pursued by the Justice Department. Though inspired by the Medicaid-recovery litigation undertaken by 43 states since 1994, the federal suit is on an altogether vaster scale. Matthew Myers of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids says the state and federal suits are as different as "a World War I shell and the atom bomb." There's just one drawback: Many lawyers argue that the federal government doesn't have a legal leg to stand on.

TO ADMIT THAT SMOKING MIGHT ACTUALLY SAVE THE GOVERNMENT MONEY IS HERESY TO THOSE BENT ON A FEDERAL SUIT AGAINST BIG TOBACCO.

President Clinton first proposed a federal suit against the tobacco companies in his State of the Union address this past January, but the idea had been batted around in the upper echelons of the trial bar for a few years. Richard Scruggs and Michael Moore, two architects of the state lawsuits against the tobacco companies, began lobbying the Justice Department in 1994 to initiate litigation. As Moore explained at a Senate hearing in June 1997, they had no success: "We were informed that the Justice Department and others did not feel that they had a cause of action under the federal statutory framework, so they could not file such a lawsuit." Janet Reno herself had affirmed two months before that "the federal government [did] not have an independent cause of action" against the tobacco companies.

Last December, though, the department modified its position. Why? Anti-tobacco activists insist that over the past two years more information has been uncovered demonstrating that the tobacco companies criminally withheld data on the health risks associated with smoking. They also insist that earlier, administration officials didn't look seriously at pursuing a case, but over the last year, compelling new legal analyses affirming the right to sue have gained currency.

The reality is much simpler: Politics trumped the law.

When Clinton administration officials began exploring a federal suit in 1997, they quickly encountered an obstacle. Frank Hunger, then the head of the Justice Department's civil division, which would have jurisdiction over such a suit, was strongly opposed. He and one of his deputies, George Phillips, argued that the statutory authority simply didn't exist to sue the tobacco companies. And Hunger's personal history inoculated him against charges he was pro-tobacco: His wife, who was Al Gore's sister, died from a smoking-related illness in 1984.

Hunger's opposition stopped the lawsuit locomotive. But once the White House-backed tobacco bill died in June 1998, the president's interest in a lawsuit revived, and Justice was told to get cracking. Rahm Emanuel, a former top Clinton aide, has told David Cloud of the *Wall Street Journal* that "if the White House hadn't asked, [Justice] would never have looked at [a lawsuit] again." Senator Richard Durbin, an Illinois Democrat, was even more explicit, saying that since Clinton administration officials have "seen that the tobacco industry holds such sway over the Republican Congress, they don't feel there is the likelihood of any legislation being passed. So, they turned to the courts."

It wasn't long before a Justice Department task force was established to craft the next move against the tobacco industry. And in a choice that spoke volumes, one of the individuals selected to lead it was William Schultz. Now an attorney in the Civil Division at Justice, Schultz is a veteran anti-tobacco crusader who's worked for Rep. Henry Waxman and at the Food and Drug Administration for David Kessler.

The pro-lawsuit task force received unexpected good news early this year when Hunger announced he was leaving Justice to return to private practice and assist Gore's presidential campaign. His successor as head of the civil division was widely expected to be a Justice Department veteran who was valued for his non-political outlook and management experience.

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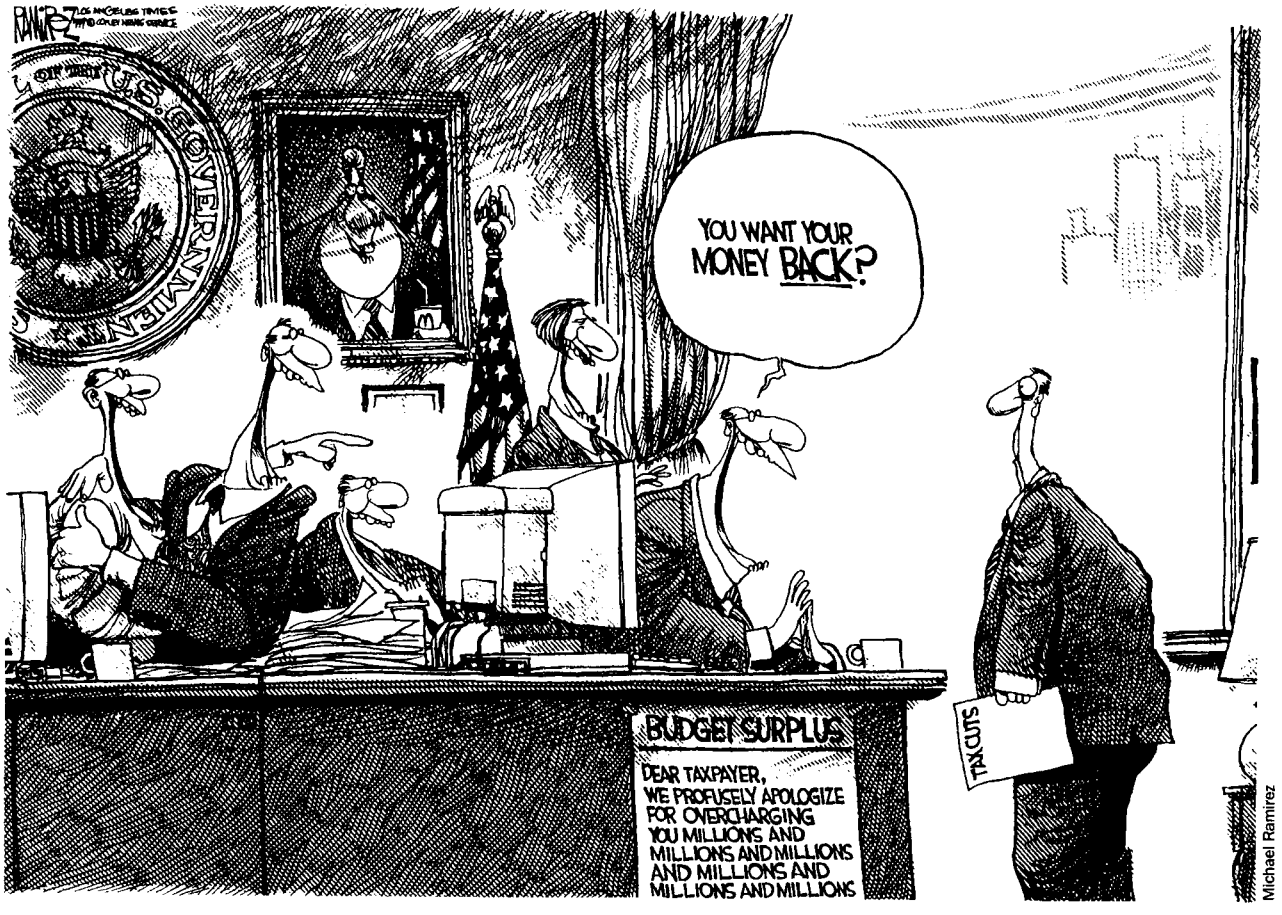
But this individual had a problem. He, like Hunger, was skeptical of a federal case against the tobacco companies, and so he was passed over, underlining the importance of the lawsuit to the White House. The post was given instead to David Ogden, a Justice Department lawyer who had little management experience but who had served as Reno's chief of staff and, more important, had expressed sympathy for federal tobacco litigation.

Equally revealing of the pro-lawsuit mindset has been the nexus between the Clinton administration and anti-tobacco trial lawyers. John Coale, a prominent plaintiff's lawyer, told me he's met with White House officials "seven or eight times" to discuss a federal lawsuit. Similarly, Michael Moore, the anti-tobacco attorney general of Mississippi, boasts of meeting with administration officials "on many occasions" and implies that his and Scruggs's "efforts" helped bring Justice around on the merits of a lawsuit. Perhaps most revealing of all, Justice announced in April that it had hired as "consultants on tobacco litigation" Robins, Kaplan, Miller & Ciresi, a Minneapolis law firm that successfully represented the state of Minnesota and Blue Cross and Blue Shield in a $6.6 billion case against Philip Morris last year.

Given their ties to the administration, as well as their experience with tobacco cases, these lawyers could become leading members of the prosecution in a future federal suit. Sensitive about appearances, Coale notes that "the lawyers have offered their services pro bono, so no one's going to make a buck."

But even with Hunger out of the way and pro-lawsuit attorneys in position, the problem remained that no statute gives the federal government an independent right of recovery for Medicare expenditures. The statute cited most often in support of a case is the Medical Care Recovery Act, signed into law in 1962 to facilitate the recovery of health care costs incurred by members of the armed services. But the Medical Care Recovery Act was never intended to cover Medicare, which was created only in 1965. Indeed, the federal government has never before attempted to recover Medicare funds from third-party tortfeasors. Even Richard Daynard, who heads Northeastern University's Tobacco Control Resource Center, concedes, "I don't know of any precedent for something like this."

If the government is allowed to proceed with a case, it will immediately encounter a further chal-



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lenge, as well: proving causation. David Vladeck, an anti-tobacco lawyer at the Naderite group Public Citizen, observes in a pro-suit memo that "the government would have to shoulder the burden of showing that the tobacco industry's actions legally caused the injuries to millions of nameless individuals." In other words, the health records of every person with an illness could be scrutinized, and the government would have the burden of proving that smoking and not, say, lack of exercise, had caused each illness. This, writes Vladeck, presents "perhaps the greatest obstacle to bringing an action under the Medical Care Recovery Act."

A final difficulty is that the claim underlying a federal case—namely, that smoking costs the federal government billions of dollars in health care expenditures—may be false. A June report from the Congressional Research Service, a government agency, concludes that because smokers die prematurely and thus do not receive retirement benefits or incur nursing-home costs, they *save* the federal government $29 billion each year in health care expenditures.

To admit even the possibility that smoking might save the government money is, of course, heresy to those intent on suing big tobacco. While they recognize they're entering uncharted legal waters, they expect the industry to be defeated if the case goes forward. "I've always believed," says Daynard, "that on a level playing field, the tobacco companies lose." Perhaps, but judging by the exceptional lengths the administration is willing to go in its war on smoking, the playing field will be anything but level.

Matthew Rees is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

HOMAGE TO CATANIA

by Eric Forman

BY ANY LIGHTS D.C. seemed like the last place in America where taxes would be cut. Along with high crime rates, poor services, and a dysfunctional educational system, the District of Columbia has a poverty rate that, if it were a state, would be the second worst in the nation. (Instead of crisscrossing the country, President Clinton could have just taken a walk around the District for his recent "poor tour.") And despite years of mismanagement and corruption under Marion Barry, the District's answer to practically every problem has been increased spending. Fortunately, none of this stopped David Catania from aggressively pursuing a tax cut.

The role of maverick suits Catania, who is perhaps most famous as the council's first openly gay member. His strategy was novel. In January 1998, the Republican council member at large, just a month into his term, began asking residents how they wanted the city's surplus to be spent. From comment cards distributed at his public appearances, Catania discovered that, lo and behold, many residents of D.C., where 80 percent of registered voters are Democrats, wanted the surplus to be used for personal and business tax reductions.

IN THE END, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA'S $300 MILLION A YEAR TAX CUT PASSED UNANIMOUSLY, WITH THE MAYOR'S SUPPORT.

In any case, something had to be done. Since 1960, D.C.'s tax rates have nearly doubled. During the same period, the District has lost nearly a third of its population. "In Virginia," Catania says, "you have good services at a good price. In Maryland you have okay services at an okay price. And in the District you have terrible services at an expensive price." But with only 2 Republicans on the 13-member city council, Catania had his work cut out for him.

At the same time that Catania was canvassing residents on what to do with the surplus, he was approaching council members about a tax cut. Their response was lukewarm. Several members were running in the Democratic mayoral primary and viewed tax cuts as politically risky. After Jack Evans, a moderate Democrat with close ties to business, lost that primary, the cautious pol suddenly became more receptive. This was a good alliance for Catania; Evans knows a thing or two about winning. While campaigning in 1991 for a seat on the council, Evans visited gay bars in Dupont Circle, the district he hoped to represent, leading many to believe that he was gay, an impression the now-married politician did nothing to dispel.

Together, Evans and Catania put together an extensive package of information showing the District could afford the tax cuts. And their timing was excel-

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lent. The council, which for years has been viewed as politically impotent, was looking for an opportunity to impose its will on the new mayor, Anthony Williams. Catania and Evans began courting their respective allies on the council and were able to pick up seven additional votes. By the time the Tax Parity Act of 1999 was introduced on "tax day," April 15, it already had the support of the council.

With its surplus, Catania and Evans reasoned, the District could lower income and property taxes to the levels found in Maryland and Northern Virginia. This would at least slow the flight of residents, if not lure people and businesses back. The income tax rate for all groups would be lowered by one percentage point a year for the next three years, reducing the top marginal rate from 9.5 percent to 6.5 percent. This would be a 50 percent reduction for people making under $10,000 a year and a 32 percent reduction for everyone making over $20,000. Taxes on businesses and rental and commercial properties would also be reduced substantially to become more competitive. After three years, District taxpayers would be saving $420 million a year, with individuals enjoying 56 percent of the benefits.

David Catania

Although the council approved the proposal by 10-2, the mayor, the Financial Control Board, and the *Washington Post*'s editorial board, all immediately criticized it. Unwilling to believe that lowering taxes can increase revenue, critics worried the tax cuts would force cutbacks in services or generate deficits. The local head of the AFL-CIO, Joslyn N. Williams, said the package was "unacceptable because it is not targeted at those residents who need it most—the working poor and middle-income households." The *Washington Post* wrote that the "tax-slashing plan" was "too much too soon." Others argued that the surpluses should be used to combat the city's social problems.

But all of this carping overlooked the basic injustice of paying high taxes for terrible services. According to Catania, the District spends a whopping $13,500 per student each year on education. And 20 percent of the city's $5.3 billion budget is spent on public welfare. In the words of council member Carol Schwartz, "If high taxes meant good services, we should have the best services in the country." That clearly is not the case, and D.C. residents had begun to realize it.

Although Evans and Catania had enough votes to block a threatened mayoral veto, they could not overcome the opposition of the Financial Control Board, a presidentially appointed oversight commission created by Congress in 1995. So they decided to compromise and were able to build a broad consensus for a more moderate tax cut. The resulting legislation, which passed unanimously with the mayor's support, reduces marginal rates by a smaller percentage and stretches the time for implementation from three to five years. In response to the charge that the "rich" would enjoy a disproportionate share of the savings, the highest tax bracket will be raised gradually from $20,000 to $40,000. This final package will eventually save taxpayers about $300 million a year.

Whereas the original plan cut the marginal rate for the poorest residents by 50 percent over three years, the new plan only cuts it by 33 percent over five years. Yet somehow the *Washington Post* judges this plan fairer than the original, which allegedly had "serious distributional defects." Nonetheless, it is the largest cut in District history. And, as Grover Norquist, president of Americans for Tax Reform, said, the tax cut is "substantial compared to any city's" and a "tremendous step forward" for the District.

Most important, it seems the District is growing a conscience. At a certain point, says Catania, it's just immoral "to pick a person's pocket in the name of government and give him nothing for it."

Eric Forman is a senior at Duke University, where he is publisher of the **Duke Review.**

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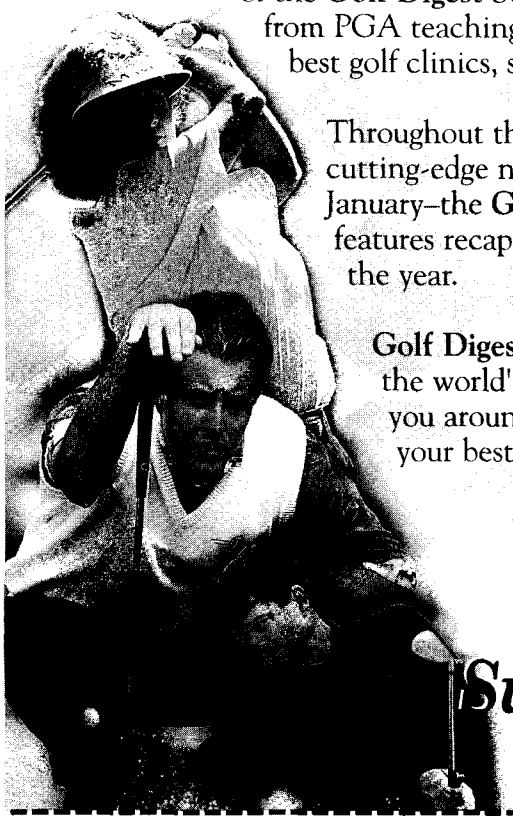

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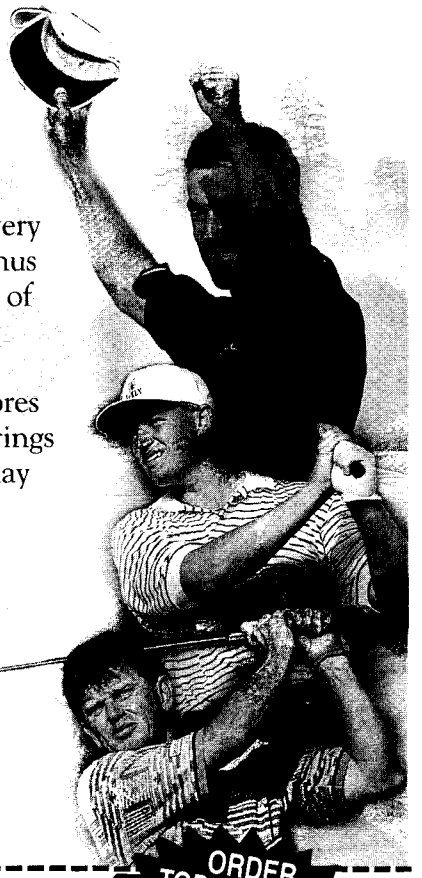

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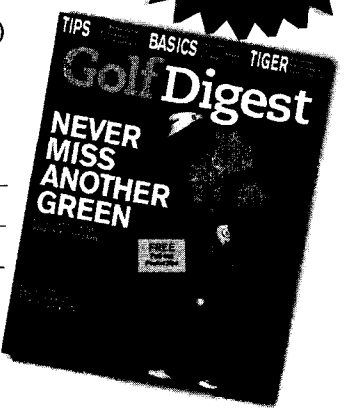

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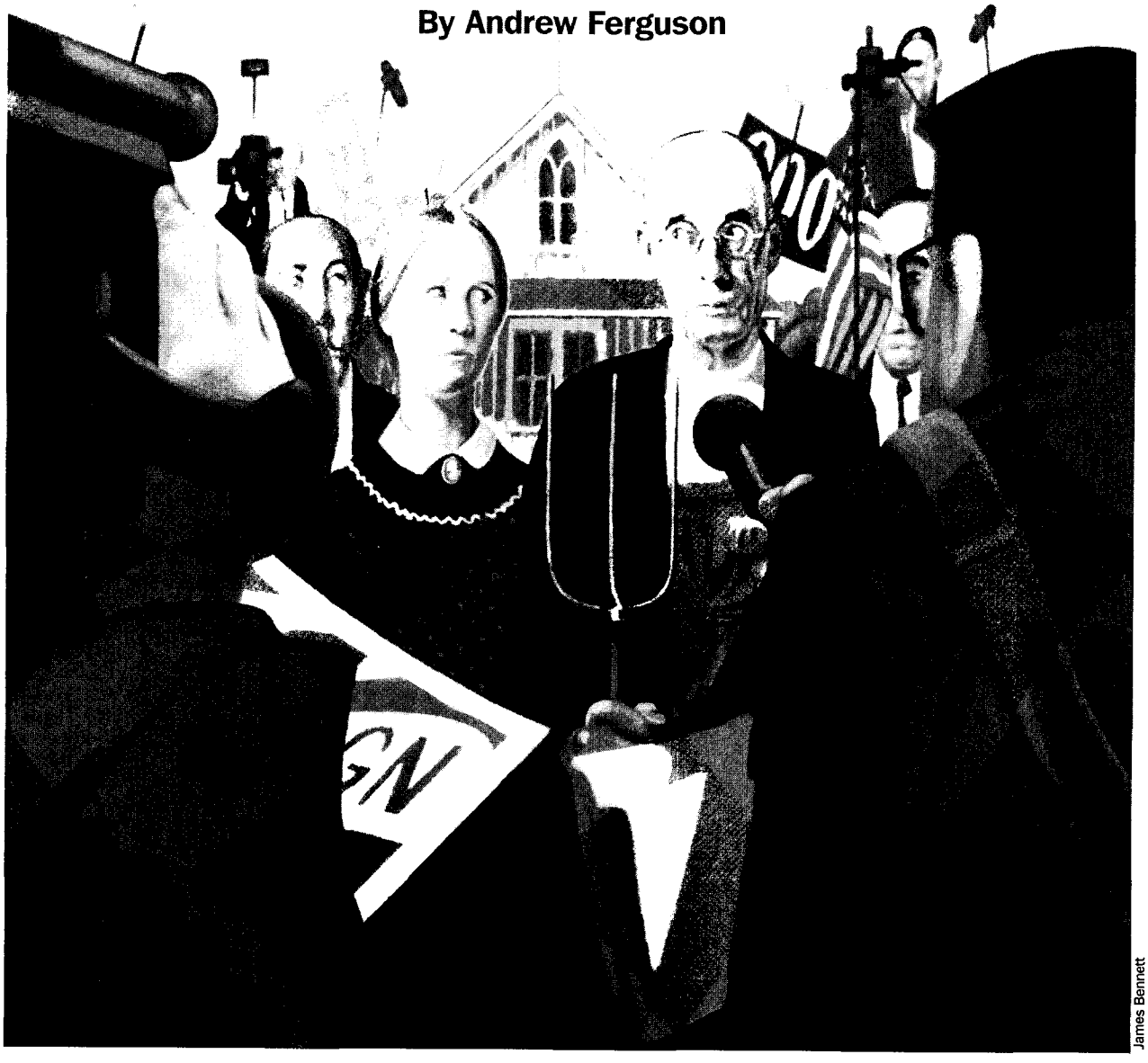
IOWA GOTHIC

The Thrill of Being Ground Zero of Campaign 2000

By Andrew Ferguson



James Bennett

Belle Plaine, Iowa

A former two-term governor of Tennessee, a former university president, a former secretary of one of the more worthless cabinet departments (Education) under President Bush—Lamar Alexander is all these things, which is to say he is the very picture of the moderate establishmentarian Republican. So it's surprising to find him transformed, all of a sudden, into a fire-breathing populist. But that's the way he sounds, here in the backyard of a farmhouse outside the tiny Iowa town of Belle Plaine, with the smoke rising from the kettle-drum roasters and the laundry flapping on a line in the evening breeze, and a crowd of two dozen farmers arrayed around picnic tables, gnawing on chicken legs and slurping up a farmwife's special-recipe macaroni salad (extra mayonnaise, heavy on the pickle relish).

"Now you know there's a lot of people back there in Washington, D.C., who want to tell you the Iowa caucuses don't matter anymore," Alexander says, his accent thickening syllable by syllable. "There are some in *Big Media*, some of these *Big Money* people,

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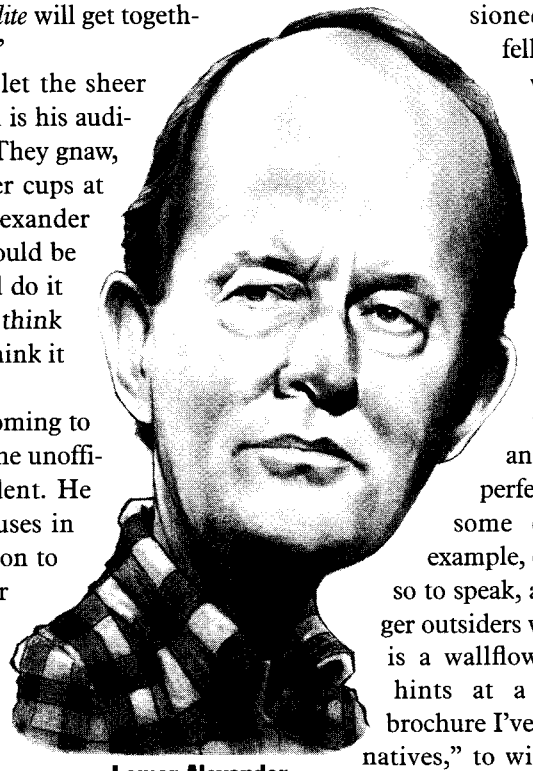
who want to tell you this thing is all wrapped up. They think *they're* going to elect our president. But since when is it the prerogative of people far away to tell us we can't elect a president on our own?"

Alexander seems genuinely appalled. "Is the price of corn on the front pages of *their* newspapers every morning? Are *they* the ones who care about families in Iowa? I don't think so. I'll tell you this. If they get their way, you'll never see another presidential candidate in Belle Plaine. Never. They'll just fly into Des Moines airport, and they'll stack up a couple bales of hay for a backdrop in a big airplane hangar, and they'll give a speech, and then they'll fly off, and the Big Media and the Big Money—the *elite* will get together and *they'll* select the president."

He pauses for a moment to let the sheer horror of it sink in, but the truth is his audience doesn't seem too horrified. They gnaw, they slurp, they refill their paper cups at the keg of Bud Light, and Alexander closes: "Well, I don't think it should be done that way. I think we should do it the way it's always been done. I think we should have a contest, and I think it should start right here in Iowa!"

Lamar Alexander has been coming to Iowa regularly since 1993, when he unofficially began running for president. He finished third in the Iowa caucuses in 1996, and then lost the nomination to Bob Dole, of course, and after Dole lost in November, Alexander turned right around and started running again. He's visited more than 60 counties in the last four weeks, shaken more hands than his competitors have ever tried to shake, gnawed on more chicken legs and eaten more tubs of macaroni salad than they could ever stomach. And look: Four months before the Iowa caucuses, two weeks before the suddenly important Ames straw poll, he is a mere blip in the polls, a semi-non-entity crouched with his rivals beneath the giant looming presence of George W. Bush, who has never been to Belle Plaine—who has, in fact, campaigned in Iowa exactly twice. If George Bush runs off with Iowa, or, more accurately, if Iowa runs off with George Bush, it will be a triumph of money, of celebrity, of the *establishment*.



Lamar Alexander

Chas Fagan

So you can understand Alexander's frustration, but it comes up from something deeper than wounded vanity. After most of the farmers have gone home he sits at a picnic table in the twilight and talks about Iowa. "This is a very special place," he says. "This is the only place where there's any reality left in the whole electoral process. Here you can come to a small town and spend three hours with real people. You can listen to them and learn from them. They can get to know you. You get in touch with something more real than New York or Washington.

"But now"—he sounds wistful, almost sentimental—"I'm afraid all that's about to change. I think we're about to witness the last Iowa caucus."

He sighs the deep sigh of a disillusioned man, of a man who fell, and fell hard, for the myth of Iowa, and who sees the myth turning to vapor before his eyes.

In truth, there's no good reason for anyone to care much about Iowa, other than Iowans and their immediate family members. It is a pleasant place, particularly the eastern farmlands rolling down toward the Mississippi River, and it is scattered throughout with perfectly pleasant people. But unlike some other states—New York, for example, or Texas or California—it is not, so to speak, a lapel-grabber; it does not stagger outsiders with claims on their attention. It is a wallflower state. Even its boosterism hints at a lack of self-assurance. One brochure I've seen bragged of Iowa's "famous natives," to wit: John Wayne, who moved to California when he was 9, Herbert Hoover, who moved to Oregon when he was 10, and the man who invented Bufferin, who stayed. While the U.S. population has quadrupled in the past century, Iowa's population is only slightly higher than it was in 1900.

Of course, the reason Iowa draws the solicitations of men like Lamar Alexander, not to mention the sinister elites of Big Money and Big Media, is its custom of holding early political caucuses during presidential election years. Here Iowans gather on an evening in January and express a preference for president by electing delegates to the national conventions. By state law the caucuses are the first to be held in the nation every quadrennial cycle, providing both financiers and journalists with their earliest hard data about the rela-

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tive strength of national candidates. Like so many American political traditions, the caucuses came about by accident. Specifically, it's all Gary Hart's fault.

After the debacle of 1968, the Democratic party set about democratizing itself, in preparation for the 1972 convention. A national commission redrafted the rules by which states would choose their delegates, hoping to wrest control of the process from the grubby mitts of bosses like Mayor Daley and restore it to the fabled "grass roots," which the party was just then beginning, with the familiar disastrous results, to romanticize. Under the new rules, state parties were required to give members every opportunity to hold precinct meetings and express their preferences well in advance of state conventions. As it happened, Iowa Democrats had already scheduled their convention for May 1972. This forced them to hold their preliminary state caucuses no later than January.

"Part of the problem was slow printers," a veteran Iowa Democrat, Ron Masters, recently told the *Mason City Globe-Gazette*. "With all the new rules, in order to get everything printed and distributed before the convention, it was necessary to move up the caucus date." Technological ineptitude turned out to be a godsend for the Iowa Democrats, for without realizing it they had positioned their caucuses as the first real contest in the 1972 presidential campaign.

A LONGSHOT HAS A CHANCE TO BECOME A FRONT-RUNNER, AS CARTER DID AND MCGOVERN BEFORE HIM. THIS IS THE ESSENCE OF THE IOWA MYTH.

Iowa Democrats may not have quite grasped the ramifications, but Gary Hart did. Hart was managing the longshot campaign of George McGovern, who was desperate to make a good showing early in the primaries and upend the establishment front-runner, Edmund Muskie. Throughout 1971, Hart concentrated on Iowa. To the national press he extolled the rustic simplicity, the democratic purity, of the caucuses, as though he were tipping them off to a greasy-spoon restaurant with spectacular rhubarb pie. Then he packed the meetings with McGovernites. It worked. The press flocked, as the press tends to do. Muskie was blindsided. McGovern's "unexpectedly strong showing"—a phrase used, for one candidate or another, in every caucus since—weakened Muskie's candidacy, which then imploded in New Hampshire. Within weeks after the caucuses Muskie was a ghost, and McGovern won the nomination.

By 1974, another longshot, Jimmy Carter, was wooing Iowans with an ardor that would have been unthinkable three years earlier. He slept on couches in the living rooms of supporters (imagine waking up to find Jimmy Carter on your couch!), wound his way through the booths of coffee shops in every tiny town he could find, and for two solid years droned his message of trust and honesty in churches and feed lots and courthouse squares. The Iowans weren't stupefied but impressed. Carter didn't win the Iowa caucuses. He finished second, after "uncommitted." But his performance was certified an "unexpectedly strong showing." It launched him toward the White House. And it solidified the Iowa myth.

Already, by the time of Carter's victory, political scientists, *New York Times* reporters, and other professionally thoughtful people had begun to fret about the impersonality of presidential campaigns. The lament is familiar even today—especially today. Misleading soundbites, negative television ads, and cheap sloganeering have overwhelmed the "process." But Iowa, goes the myth—Iowa is different. In Iowa, as in New Hampshire, the process is virginal. Here politics is one-on-one—retail, to use the inescapable phrase. Iowans, born of the heartland, can spot a phony a mile away. As the candidate woos the rustics in Belle Plaine and Charidon and Monona, in backyard pig-roasts and garden-club meetings, all the decadent trappings of modern presidential campaigning drop away. The advantages conferred by money, fame, and establishment connections are neutralized. High-priced consultants won't help you here. In Iowa all candidates stand on equal footing before the horny-handed sons of toil, who will not be fooled.

Thus in Iowa as nowhere else, a longshot, poorly financed and unrecognized, has a chance to transform himself into a front-runner, as Carter did, and McGovern before him. This is the essence of the myth, and as a result the longshots swarm the state, making for amusing spectacles. At the end of July, the town of Ladora, about a two-hour drive east of Des Moines (in Iowa, every place is a two-hour drive from every place else), got up its annual "Ladora Days Parade," Grand Marshal Pat Buchanan presiding.

The parade assembled on the outskirts of town, though with a population of 388, Ladora is short-skirted. "It never quite recovered from the crash of '29,"

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said one old-timer who now owns the local bank building. Just the building, not the bank. The bank itself closed in 1931. Buchanan led the procession, driving an antique Excalibur roadster that played "Anchors Aweigh" when you tooted the horn, followed by a color guard from the local American Legion post, two more antique cars, several flag-festooned flatbed trucks piled up with kids throwing candy, a fire engine, a truck from the local fertilizer distributor, one go-cart and one tractor, and a convertible Corvair with the beauty queen of Iowa County waving wanly in the back. Local candidates for state senator and state representative brought up the rear, on foot.

As the parade turned onto the main drag of abandoned store fronts, and passed clumps of elderly Iowans seated in lawn chairs on the sidewalk, it quickly became apparent that there were more people in the parade than watching it. After a few minutes the parade turned again, and came to rest where it began. Picnic tables were set out. Volunteers dug up chunks of charred pig from a roasting pit and started breaking them up for sandwiches. From the back of a parked flatbed truck a woman played "Faith of Our Fathers" and "Love Me Tender" on a portable organ. The beauty queen explained to a woman in a Betsy Ross costume—the wife, as it happened, of the man who owned the bank building—that she might have to leave early to start her shift in her mother's ice cream shop in Victor. Buchanan mingled, doing Iowa retail. "You know, don't you," he was saying to the man who had brought the Excalibur, "the Japanese didn't even *make* cars till after World War Two!"

THE BEAUTY QUEEN EXPLAINED TO A WOMAN IN A BETSY ROSS COSTUME THAT SHE MIGHT HAVE TO LEAVE EARLY FOR HER SHIFT AT THE ICE CREAM PARLOR.

The state senator, a personable fellow named Neal Schuerer, told me how the economic revitalization of Ladora—in fact, of "all of central east Iowa"—was aborning. "People are coming here to retire, seeking a semi-rural lifestyle," he said. "You should see some of the houses going up between Iowa City and Cedar Rapids. And you're seeing a lot—*a lot*—of high-tech companies giving us a look. You come back here in five years. You're going to see Silicon on the Prairie, I guarantee you." He gestured extravagantly behind him, where an abandoned grain elevator rose up from a gravel lot.

The crowd never grew larger than 35 or 40, but Buchanan, in his speech, gave them the Full Pat nonetheless. He dwelled, as candidates in Iowa must these days, on the farm crisis now roiling the state. The crisis is caused by four straight years of bumper crops and low commodity prices, which distinguishes it from the 1980s farm crisis, which was caused by three straight years of failing crops and high commodity prices. To Buchanan the solution lies in tougher trade policies.

"My friends," he said, standing on the flatbed, "what's happened to pork and corn in Iowa is happening all over this country. It's happening to apples in Washington state, to dairy in Wisconsin, to cotton in Louisiana. We're going to lose every farm in America if we don't do something.

"And what's the president doing? First he's got some Hollywood lawyer negotiating trade policy with the Chinese, now he's got some academic doing it. But once I'm president I'll tell those Chinese—those Chinese leaders who close off their markets and point missiles at us and persecute Christians—I'll tell them, 'You've got a new American in the Oval Office. And you're going to start buying our crops with that $300 billion trade surplus, or you've sold your last pair of chopsticks in the United States of America!"

Thus goes the magical one-on-one, the retailing of ideas in Iowa. Like Alexander, like most politicians, Buchanan relishes the travel, the ever-shifting landscape, the kaleidoscope of faces and venues that Iowa campaigning entails. He too is a paid-up subscriber to the Iowa myth, and like Alexander he sees it imperiled by the same sinister forces.

"I can sense a growing resentment here," Buchanan said in an interview after his speech, "people starting to sense that maybe the lobbyists and the big money and the Washington establishment have got the fix in. But that's not the Iowa way of doing things. In Iowa, there's always been an openness to outsider candidates. You start early here, you can use a powerful message to reach people directly and you can defeat the establishment. But if you take away Iowa, you might as well just have the establishment ratify the Gallup poll and select your nominee that way."

Buchanan finished second in the Iowa caucuses in 1996, right behind Bob Dole, and his "unexpectedly strong showing" is cited by Iowa sentimentalists as

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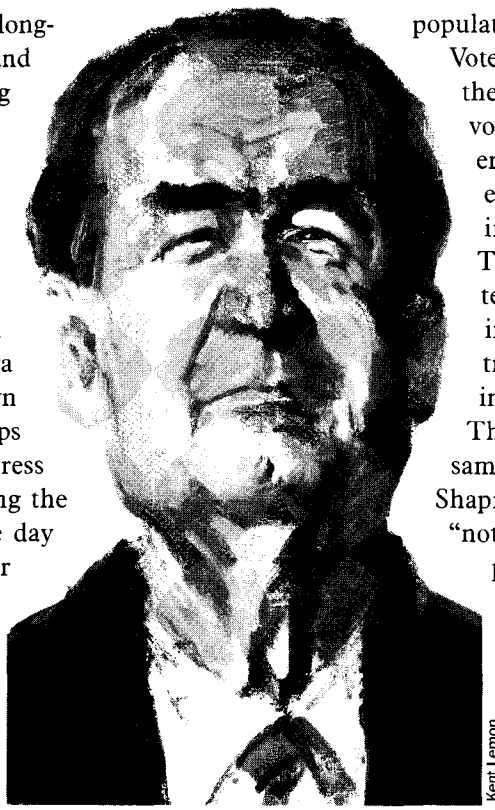
further proof of the caucuses' value. An artifact of late-sixties anti-establishment reforms, the caucuses are considered still to be an outlet for populist passion. Maybe, but even so: Buchanan lost the nomination. And so did Richard Gephardt, the longshot winner of the Democratic caucuses in 1988, and Pat Robertson, the unexpectedly strong longshot who came in second in the 1988 Republican caucus, and Gary Hart, who finished an unexpectedly strong second in 1984. In fact, not since Jimmy Carter, 23 years ago, has an Iowa-propelled longshot gone on to win his party's nomination. Mythologists might wish it otherwise, but with or without Iowa, longshots tend to remain longshots, and front-runners tend to win the big prize.

There are several interested parties that keep the myth alive, however. Among them are the longshots themselves, of course, who cannot be dissuaded from their dreams of grandeur, and Iowans, too, who see in the Iowa myth a confirmation of their own flinty independence, and, perhaps preeminently, the national press corps. The press begins covering the next presidential campaign the day after the last election, and for years reporters go hungry for hard data, for actual votes that they can chew and fight over in the news columns and on the yip-yap shows. This is what Iowa, by holding its caucuses at the beginning of election year, offers them earlier than anyone else.


Kent Lemon

Pat Buchanan

The caucuses, and the importance ascribed to them, are the inevitable result of too many reporters chasing too little news. The Iowa caucuses select fewer than 2 percent of the delegates to either party's national convention, and so the results are inconsequential on their own terms. They are nevertheless divined to indicate the relative strength of individual candidates. But even some of the reporters recognize this is a stretch.

On the one hand, Iowa is held to be a model laboratory for campaigns. As Hugh Winebrenner puts it in his exhaustive book, *The Iowa Precinct Caucuses: The Making of a Media Event*: "The work ethic and individual self-reliance are still firmly entrenched in the Iowa political culture. Public service is viewed as the duty of citizens. . . . Those who pursue public service are expected to serve honestly and in the public interest. . . . The political culture emphasizes issues and public concerns rather than individual loyalties and partisan friendships." This is politics as designed by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

On the other hand, its goo-goo tradition is partly what makes Iowa atypical, hence almost worthless as a national temperature-taker. It is the fourth whitest state in the union—fewer than 5 percent of its population is black, Hispanic, or Asian. Voter participation is much higher than the national average. Those who do vote are on average whiter, richer, older, and better educated than voters elsewhere, and those who participate in the caucuses are even more so. The large number of farmers guarantee that issues of absolutely no importance to the rest of the country—ethanol subsidies, for instance—preoccupy the candidates. The large oldster contingent has the same effect: As the journalist Walter Shapiro points out, the issue-fad of "notch babies," which gripped several presidential contenders in the 1980s, was purely a pander to Iowa's hefty cohort of senior citizens.

About 20 percent of registered voters turn out for the caucuses, which are held on a bitter cold night—winter nights in Iowa are invariably bitter cold—in church basements, community centers, and local libraries. By self-selection these are the party's activists, its hard core, and they aren't even representative of the party's rank-and-file—they're the most conservative Republicans, the most liberal Democrats. Thus a marginal candidate like Pat Robertson in 1988, who nationwide would have drawn roughly the same percentage of the vote as KoKo the Wonder Chimp, can finish a strong second in the caucuses at 25 percent. The case that the Iowa caucuses can measure a candidate's national viability is far-fetched indeed.

And now Iowa offers the Ames straw poll, which takes the implausibility to new heights. The straw

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poll is a fund-raiser for the state Republican party, and it has quickly attained a caucus-like importance—which is to say it is at once bogus and unignorable. But whereas the caucuses are meant to reflect some larger political reality, the straw poll is now taken to be a reflection of the reflection, indicating how a candidate may do in the caucuses, which indicate how a candidate may do in a real election. We are now two removes from a legitimate vote, and the scene promises to be suitably surreal. On Saturday, August 14, voters will flock to the Iowa State University campus in Ames to meet celebrities and watch entertainment furnished by the various campaigns. Then they will pay $25 apiece—provided by the campaigns—to vote for a candidate. More than 500 reporters will be there to broadcast the tally to a yawning world. And as a consequence of Ames, some presidential candidacies will die, and some will flourish.

Ames, in other words, is a function of Big Money and Big Media, celebrity and glitz—the same qualities that allegedly degrade our national politics and to which Iowa was supposed to be immune. No wonder Alexander and Buchanan and the other Republican candidates (all but George W. Bush) are frustrated and gloomy. But the reformist impulse often has such ironic consequences, and a forward-looking do-gooder may someday call for scrapping the whole thing. Or perhaps, as Alexander suggests, the caucuses themselves will soon collapse under the weight of Big Money. It's a tempting notion. And yet . . .

I mentioned all this to Neal Schuerer, the state senator back in Ladora, the day Pat Buchanan came to town. He looked horrified that anyone could object to the Iowa caucuses.

"Oh, no," he said. "Please. This is Iowa's best shot at national attention.

"You don't know what it's like to be here watching on election night in November every four years. We're sitting in our living rooms, and on TV all the people are talking, and they're waiting for Illinois returns to come in, for New York, for California—all the big states. Nobody cares about Iowa then. This is our little time in the sun. Why would anyone want to take it away from us?" ♦

Get Influential

Senator Mitch McConnell, questioning J. Michael Heyman, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, at a hearing on the Smithsonian's budget:

"I am confident that you are familiar with an article from the June 7 edition of THE WEEKLY STANDARD entitled "The National Museum of Multiculturalism." [After reading it] I spent the better part of a morning walking around the museum myself. . . . I want you to know that the article did generate a good deal of discussion among a number of Senators."

—*Transcript of Senate Rules Committee Hearing, July 28, 1999*

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The Agony of Not Being George W. Bush

Life Among the Also-Rans

By Tucker Carlson

Des Moines, Iowa

Drive around Des Moines long enough and you begin to see the connection between a candidate's headquarters and the campaign he's running. The Quayle 2000 headquarters, for instance, is virtually invisible from the street and almost entirely deserted at one o'clock in the afternoon on a weekday. "Everyone's at lunch," says the lone staffer manning the phone. Elizabeth Dole's office, meanwhile, is spread out across the showroom floor of a defunct foreign car dealership. The front door is decorated with at least three No Smoking stickers. Somehow that makes sense. So does the Forbes for President office, which shares a building with the American College of Hair Styling. And the Lamar Alexander office, its window only partly filled with faded campaign signs, many held up with duct tape, that look suspiciously like leftovers from the 1996 race. And what to make of Gary Bauer's headquarters, which is located in a converted urologist's office? Or of the Keyes and Buchanan campaign HQs, both of which sit directly across the street from a porn shop?

BUSH IS SO FAR AHEAD IN THE POLLS THAT MANY OF HIS OPPONENTS CONSIDER HIM, FOR THE MOMENT ANYWAY, IRRELEVANT.

One thing you won't see driving around Des Moines is George W. Bush's Iowa campaign office. That's because it's not in Des Moines, but in Clive, an upscale suburb west of town. From the office of any other Republican candidate, it takes a long time to get to where Bush is.

Not that the other candidates are spending much time figuring out how to get there. Bush is so far ahead in the polls that many of his opponents consider him, for now anyway, irrelevant. No one doubts Bush will win the August 14 straw poll in Ames. The question is, Who else will leave Ames with a plausible presidential campaign? There's room for three, maybe four other serious contenders. The rest will have to go home and find law firm sinecures. It's enough to make a second-string presidential candidate a little desperate.

You can see it in the campaign literature, which just about everybody but Bush has begun to produce in bales. Last week, Lamar Alexander sent out a press release boasting that his "traveling campaign got a boost in spirits when Joe Klein, political reporter for the *New Yorker* and author of *Primary Colors*, joined the tour for a couple of stops." The release didn't mention the story Klein returned to New York and wrote, which described Lamar as a pathetic loser who is "probably irrelevant" to the presidential race.

Gary Bauer, by contrast, has decided to leave nothing out of his campaign literature. In a pamphlet entitled "Testimony," Bauer tells the story of his poverty-stricken childhood—the whole story. Bauer includes details of his father's alcoholism, his parents' marriage, even the demise of his uncle, an employee of an "organized crime syndicate" who was "machine-gunned to death" by mobsters. It makes for a compelling read, if not for a compelling reason to vote for Bauer.

If it's compelling reasons you're looking for, look no further than Alan Keyes. A headline on the latest Keyes pamphlet warns readers that "your support for Alan Keyes is critical to the destiny of America." Inside, in place of the usual heartwarming photos of the candidate with supporters, is an essay thousands of words long explaining why Americans have devolved from "a free and vigilant people" to "tax serfs." The typeface is tiny, and many of the ideas straddle the line between brilliance and eccentricity. But at least it's not slick. It's clear Keyes wrote every word himself.

Not so some of his other campaign material, which

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is obviously staff-produced. In June, Keyes won two minor Iowa county straw polls. The Keyes 2000 Des Moines office promptly released a statement heralding the triumph. "The Straw Poll victories," announced his campaign manager, "dispel any doubts that Alan Keyes is a viable candidate and that he has little chance to win the nomination."

AN AIDE EXPLAINS THE KEYES STRATEGY: OTHER CANDIDATES ARE BUYING THE $25 TICKETS FOR SUPPORTERS. NOT KEYES.

Chalk it up to a typographical error, but the Keyes people seem almost honest enough to say something like this on purpose. Inside Keyes HQ in Des Moines one afternoon in late July, Ron Granzow, the campaign's Iowa chairman, is sitting at what may be the most cluttered desk in the state. Surrounded by piles of paper, a Bible, a toothbrush, containers of food, and hundreds of other objects, Granzow cheerfully explains the Keyes strategy for the Ames straw poll. The other candidates, says Granzow, a Korean War vet and former ad salesman, are buying the $25 tickets to the poll and giving them to supporters. Not Keyes. "We're asking people to buy their own tickets. We're asking people to sacrifice." Somewhere else in the office a baby begins to cry. Granzow takes off his glasses, which are held together with a paper clip. "Frankly," he says, smiling in a slightly embarrassed kind of way, "we don't have the money to do anything else. We couldn't give tickets away if we wanted to."

Back at the American College of Hair Styling, Jim Tobin is talking about what it's like to work for a very different kind of campaign, the kind that can afford to do just about anything it wants. Tobin is the national political director of Forbes 2000. A soft-spoken Mainer, Tobin doesn't seem like the bragging type, but there is nothing modest about his description of how Forbes has been wooing potential straw poll voters. Everyone who comes to see Forbes speak at a stop along his multi-week, 77-county bus tour through Iowa, Tobin says, gets free food. Everyone who convinces five other people to come gets a gold lapel pin and a T-shirt. And everyone who happens to be in the area when Forbes arrives gets a complimentary photograph taken with the candidate, developed and returned within an hour. "He can do 100 photos in 11 minutes," Tobin says. A grin every 6.6 seconds.

The Forbes campaign in Iowa is, like its candidate, disciplined, relentless, and rich. It is also, all of a sudden, on the defensive. Late last month, the head of the state chapter of the Christian Coalition, Bobbie Gobel, came forward to claim that a Forbes operative had approached her about buying votes in the Iowa straw poll. In February, Gobel says, a Forbes organizer named Jerry Keen called her office at Metro Temp, a temporary employment agency she owns in Des Moines, and offered to hire 500 temporary workers on the day of the straw poll. Keen, Gobel says, wanted to bus the workers to Ames with the understanding they would vote for Forbes. And, true to his candidate's flinty instincts, he didn't want to spend a dollar more than necessary. "He said they only wanted to pay for two hours," Gobel says. "They didn't want to pay for the two hour bus ride. But I said, 'We can't find 500 people to work two hours. The minimum job is four hours.'" Gobel says she thought about Keen's offer, discussed it at a Christian Coalition staff meeting (where it was entered into the minutes), and decided to decline.

Gobel's claim stayed on the front page of the *Des Moines Register* for almost a week. The Forbes campaign immediately and repeatedly denounced her as a

Elizabeth Dole

Kent Lemon

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Steve Forbes

Kent Lemon

liar. "The incident never happened," says Bill Dal Col, Forbes's campaign manager. "She's embarrassing herself." Off the record, other members of Forbes's staff describe Gobel as a nut case, a victim of multiple personality disorder. Within days, under pressure from the Forbes campaign, the national office of the Christian Coalition fired her.

Gobel claims she isn't angry with Steve Forbes, only saddened by his decision to take "the Clinton path." "When he calls me a liar," she says, "it doesn't hurt me. It hurts him, because he's lost and he's wandering out there in the wilderness. He needs to find Jesus. I want Forbes and his campaign workers to know I have no hostile feelings for their sin. They have to repent."

The other campaigns watched Gobelgate with glee. "Our people in Iowa believe what she said about Forbes," says Dole spokesman Ari Fleischer. Bobbie Gobel may be very religious and very conservative, says Fleischer, but she's credible. "Whatever she says about abortion or dying on the cross, she's not a liar."

Bobbie Gobel or not, Forbes is still expected to run second, if only because he has spent so much money—reportedly over $2 million—to do it. On the day of the poll, Forbes supporters will be taken to Ames free of charge in air-conditioned buses, given free tickets to vote, fed free dinner, taken on a free balloon ride, and entertained by Ronnie Milsap and Debbie Boone at a free concert. Their children will get free face painting.

It ought to be quite a party. But will it buy anything in the end for Forbes? Not in the most obvious way. Unlike most of the other candidates, Forbes could afford to stay in the race regardless of his performance at Ames. He could come in last and still be handing out gold lapel pins in New Hampshire.

On the other hand, Forbes's spending could prompt some of his poorer Republican rivals to waste much-needed cash on the straw poll, thereby forcing some of them out before the real voting begins next year. That's the strategy, says Quayle spokesman Jonathan Baron. "We're not going to fall for that. We're telling voters, 'ride their bus, eat their steak, then vote for us.' That's the official straw poll motto of Quayle 2000."

No matter who takes the silver or the bronze at Ames, however, there is still no question about who will emerge with the gold. George W. Bush will still be in the lead when it's all over. It can be frustrating.

Not long ago, David Kochel, the Iowa campaign manager for the Lamar Alexander campaign, saw Dan Quayle sitting at a table in a steakhouse in Des Moines. Alexander and Quayle are, of course, rivals and, under ordinary circumstances, it would have been uncomfortable for Kochel to approach Quayle. But Bush's lead has changed a lot of circumstances in Iowa this summer. As Kochel puts it, at this point "we're all kind of in the same boat." So Kochel stopped by Quayle's table to say hello. The former vice president, Kochel says, was visibly agitated. "He was very exasperated, like throwing up his hands. He said, 'Can you guys do anything to stop this?' I said, 'You mean Bush?' And he said, 'Yes. Can you do anything to stop it?'"

GOBEL CLAIMS SHE ISN'T ANGRY AT FORBES, ONLY SADDENED BY HIS DECISION TO TAKE WHAT SHE CALLS "THE CLINTON PATH."

Kochel didn't answer Quayle directly. The answer was, probably not. ♦

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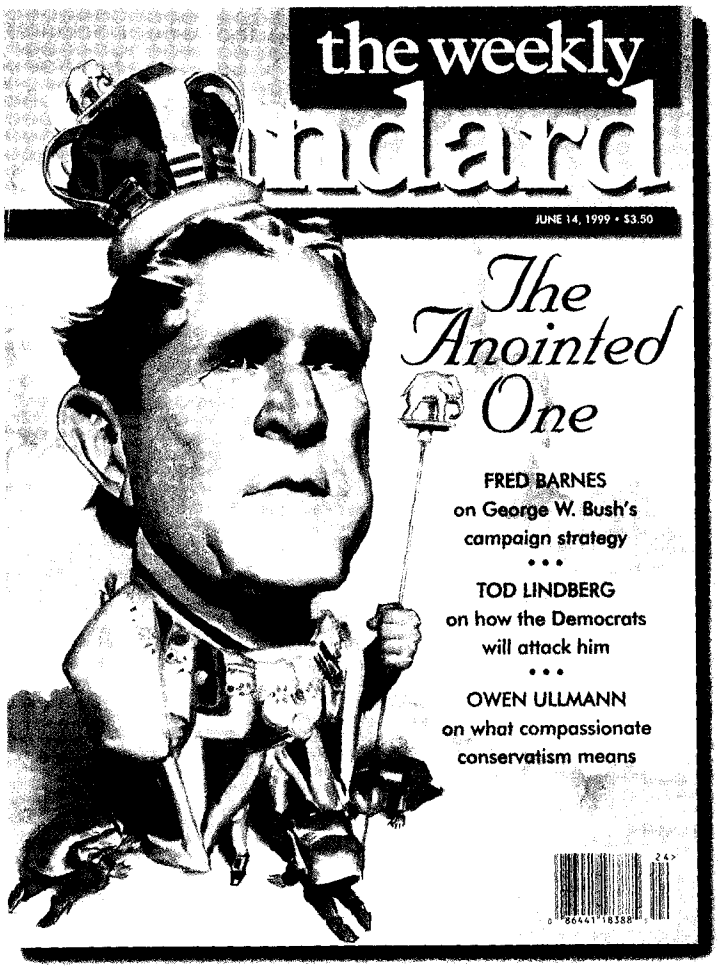

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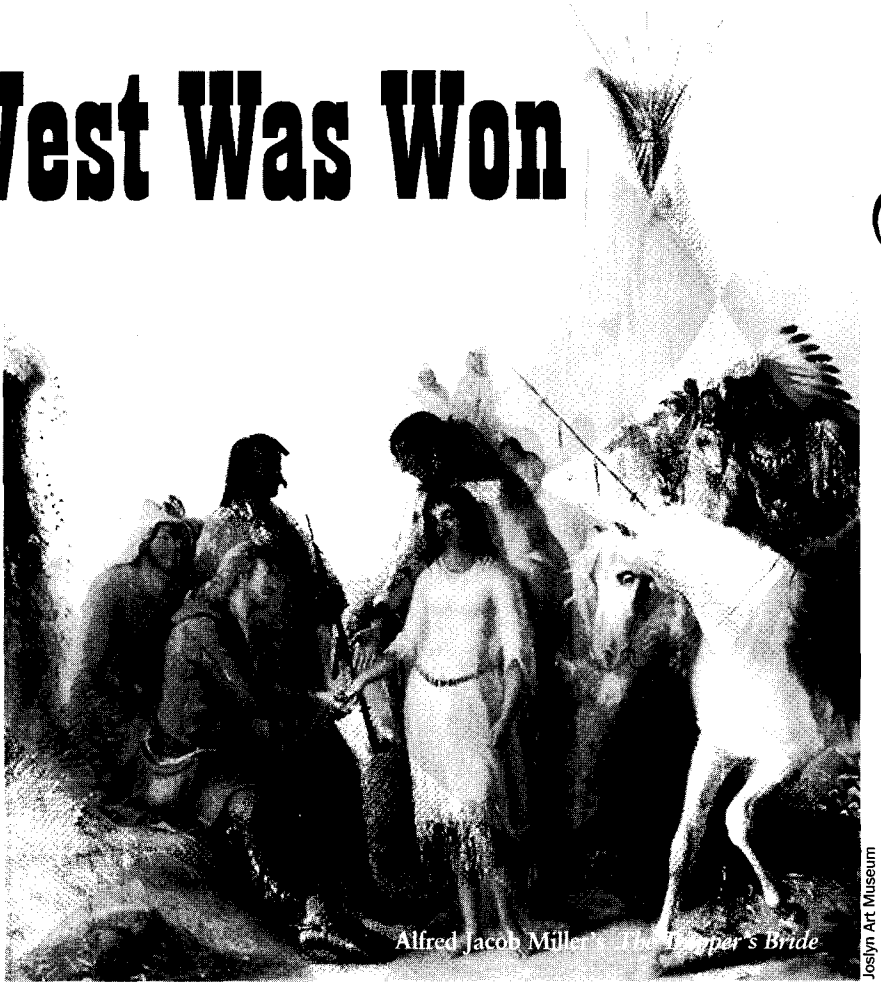
How the West Was Won

Bernard DeVoto and the Writing of American History

By Bill Croke



Alfred Jacob Miller's *The Trapper's Bride*

Joslyn Art Museum

The American historian Bernard DeVoto died in 1955 at the age of fifty-eight, and in the years since he died, the academic study of history has become entirely the province of those whom the critic Harold Bloom once labeled "the resentniks." The topics of multicultural grievance that purchase tenure for assistant history professors these days, the citationless assertions that pass for historical scholarship, the inversion of heroism into the great sin of history, the awful modern academic writing: DeVoto would have recognized very little of it—especially the writing.

Bernard DeVoto was, in fact, among the last of a long line of American historians—figures like Francis Parkman, Hubert Bancroft, Samuel Eliot Morison, and Edmund Wilson—who sought to express the best scholarship of their day in well-written books for a popular audience.

These were the writers who wanted, more than anything else, to educate America in the vigor of a distinctly American history, the strength of a distinctly American prose, and the spirit of a distinctly American character.

And the passing of their historical vision—their attempt to define for its people a vigorous, strong, and spirited nation—has meant, in the years since, the gradual diseducation of America. We are so badly *mis*informed and *un*informed about our history these days, the only mercy is that DeVoto didn't live to see it.

Bill Croke works at a Cody, Wyoming, museum where fourteen of Alfred Jacob Miller's paintings are displayed.

Of course, DeVoto had advantages more recent historians lack. The recent reissuing of two of his classics, *Across the Wide Missouri* from 1947 and *The Course of Empire* from 1952, in a handsome new set reminds us that the national literacy of the pre-television era demanded lucid prose and a good story. It's hard to imagine a Pulitzer Prize in history being awarded nowadays to a learned look at the early-nineteenth-century fur trade that portrayed the Indians as occasionally proudly noble and occasionally murderously larcenous. But it's equally hard to imagine the prize being awarded to a book that reads the way DeVoto's books read. He always wanted to tell a story, and insofar as historians remember him at all, DeVoto is now viewed as a quaint figure untouched by modern historical professionalism, a popularizer known for corny turns of phrase and a dated propensity for admiring the heroic.

BERNARD DEVOTO
Across the Wide Missouri
and
The Course of Empire
Mariner Houghton, 480 & 647 pp., $31

Born in Ogden, Utah, in 1897, Bernard Augustine DeVoto was the only child of Florian and Rose DeVoto, a weakly Catholic father and a devoutly Mormon mother whose theological squabbles left the boy a confirmed agnostic from a young age. Bright and bookish (he was reading Shakespeare at ten), DeVoto borrowed money from his parents and fled east, enrolling at Harvard in 1915. World War I goaded him into joining Harvard's ROTC regiment, but he never got closer to France than an army camp in Virginia, and he returned to receive a B.A. in English in 1920.

DeVoto's western roots—particularly his love of hiking and camping in Utah's Wasatch Mountains—were a strong influence in his mature work, but

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initially he yearned to be a novelist, and this false flame burned through his entire life. Beginning with *The Crooked Mile* in 1923, he published six novels under his own name (and four that sold better under the pseudonym John August), all competent, bland, and forgettable. If DeVoto accomplished anything with his fiction, it was only that when he came to write his great histories late in life his narrative style was fully developed.

In the mid-1940s, for instance, he was working simultaneously on both his last novel, *Mountain Time*, and his monumental history of the West, *Across the Wide Missouri*. His book of history reveals the narrative sweep and vivid rendering of a first-rate novel, and his novel reveals the relentless cataloguing and extraneous detail of a second-rate historical study. DeVoto was such a great historical writer in part because he was such a mediocre novelist.

He spent much of his life teaching, and the irony is that this man so in love with the West as a subject mostly knew it as an adult from books and the occasional summer trip. From 1922 to 1927, he taught at Northwestern University (where he married one of his students, the brainy Avis MacVicar), returning to teach at Harvard from 1929 until 1936. He was never happier than in his study in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and he loved Boston for its history, traditions, and cultural refinements.

In the late 1930s, he had a short tenure as editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, but detested New York and its backstabbing literary politics. He was a perennial instructor in the Breadloaf summer writing program from 1932 until 1949, where he cultivated a close friendship with Robert Frost that ended in 1938 with a celebrated literary feud. From 1935 until 1952, DeVoto wrote the monthly "Easy Chair" column in *Harper's* magazine. These pieces—always prickly and opinionated and on a variety of subjects political and cultural—were often controversial, and many concerned the West that his greatest books took up in greater detail.

What makes those books unique is the particular literary device that DeVoto developed and perfected. The novelist Wallace Stegner, in *The Uneasy Chair*, the marvelous 1974 biography he wrote of his friend DeVoto, called the device "History as Synecdoche," and it involved illuminating whole periods through intense concentration on one brief time and a few representative historical characters. DeVoto first used it in 1943 in *The Year of Decision: 1846*, in which he chronicled the moment that the Mexican War sputtered and spat, the Mormons were about to begin their long journey to the Great Salt Lake, the trapped Donner

Bernard DeVoto

UPI / Corbis-Bettmann

party stared at one another hungrily in the passes of the Sierra Nevadas, the vainglorious John C. Frémont pursued his pseudo-explorations—and somehow, from all these individual destinies, America's general—and Manifest—destiny emerged.

But the crowning achievement of DeVoto's device can be seen in his magisterial *Across the Wide Missouri*. This Pulitzer-Prize winner began life when DeVoto was hired by Houghton Mifflin to write twenty thousand words of scholarly captions for a book of reproductions of over a hundred watercolors owned by a Mrs. Clyde Porter of Missouri. The artist was the obscure Alfred Jacob Miller (1810-1874), the only painter known to have witnessed a "Mountain Man Rendezvous"—the annual gathering that was, in the early nineteenth century, the fur trade's combination of Wal-Mart and Mardi Gras.

DeVoto was hamstrung by misinformation and a dearth of primary sources. The American fur trade was conducted in a howling wilderness and many of its prominent protagonists—Jim Bridger and Kit Carson, for example—were illiterates. The bibliography in DeVoto's finished work reveals that he read a lot on the edges of the trade, in the business accounts of the eastern firms that promoted the trade, in the handful of ethnographical surveys undertaken at the time, and in files of the missionary agencies. There were a few firsthand journals (Osborne Russell, Zenas Leonard), memoirs (George Ruxton, Warren Ferris, Charles Larpenteur), some breezy biographies, and one that's a neglected American classic: Frances Fuller Victor's 1871 *The River of the West*, a biography of Joe Meek, "the merry mountain man" and puckish Huck Finn of the period. And DeVoto relied heavily on Hiram Chittenden's two volume *The American Fur Trade of the Far West* (1902), the definitive history that DeVoto said "was indispensable to understanding the fur trade."

He did not set out to best Chittenden's voluminous view, however. DeVoto's own narrative doesn't start until the trade is a generation old. Absent are Lewis and Clark's tour, the savage adventures of John Colter and George Drouillard, the epic wanderings of Wilson Price Hunt's Astorians and Jedediah Smith, and William Ashley's opening of the interior in 1822. The first half dozen summer Rendezvous are not noted. Instead, DeVoto's genius in this, his masterpiece, lay in chronicling the years 1832-39, the trade's climax and slow decline, the epoch offered as the transition from the pristine to the settled West.

It was in these years that the fur trade became steadily more competitive, even murderous. The advantage in the beaver-rich, intermountain West was held by the men who'd helped William Ashley explore the interior in 1822: Jim Bridger, Thomas Fitzpatrick, Henry Fraeb, Baptiste Gervais, and all the others known collectively as the Rocky

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Drawing of a fur trapper's cabin in the mid-1800s.

Mountain Fur Company. But four new concerns fought the established former-Ashley men: John Jacob Astor's American Fur Company, the British Hudson's Bay Company, and efforts by two noteworthy (and doomed-to-fail) entrepreneurs, Benjamin Bonneville and Nathaniel Wyeth. By the mid-1830s, nearly a thousand white men connected with the trade roamed the Rockies.

DeVoto is unabashedly biased in his admiration for the Ashley alumni—"Falstaff's Battalion" as he calls them—those shock troops of Manifest Destiny who first came up the Missouri in 1822. At the 1833 Rendezvous on the Green River, Bridger was a ten-year veteran and only twenty-nine years old. The sinewy Irishman Fitzpatrick was thirty-four, as was William Sublette. Kit Carson (though not present in 1833 and not of the original forty Ashley men) had spent seven years trapping in the southern Rockies out of Santa Fe by the time he was twenty-four. After four years in the mountains, Joe Meek was twenty-three. They were vigorous, on-the-make, American types, and DeVoto thought of them in classical terms: Caesar and Alexander in buckskins, with himself as their Plutarch.

If there was, in fact, a classical ideal of the mountain man, these men were it. They were young, possessed of a nervy sense of grace under pressure, vast knowledge of the Indians, and supreme wilderness skills. They commanded brigades of fifty to a hundred trappers (not to mention Indian wives, children, and camp keepers) that moved with military precision through the remote defiles of the Rockies, trapping the streams, fighting regular skirmishes with hostile Indians, and guarding against the trade's main occupational hazard, horse thieves. DeVoto entertained a theory that the fur brigades were superior to the native Indians, since they came from outside and mastered an environment they were not born to. In one of many devotional asides, he writes that:

> Treatises could be written on the specific details. . . . Why do you follow the ridges in and out of unfamiliar country? What do you do for the companion who has collapsed for lack of water while crossing a desert? How do you get meat when you find yourself without gunpowder in a country barren of game? What tribe of Indians made this trail, how many were in the band, what errand were they on. . . . How many horses did they have and why, how many squaws accompanied them, what mood were they in? Buffalo are moving downwind, an elk is in an unlikely place or posture, too many magpies are hollering, a wolf's howl is off key—what does it mean?

In a fascinating chapter entitled "Massacre: Sport and Business," DeVoto writes that following the mountain men's "Pierre's Hole Rendezvous" in the summer of 1832, Bridger and Fitzpatrick led a large Rocky Mountain Fur Company brigade in what can only be described as an invasion of the previously sacrosanct Blackfeet country of western Montana. They were dogged by an American Fur Company brigade under Henry Vanderburgh and Andrew Drips, and despite passing through prime beaver country in the Blackfoot River region, not much trapping was accomplished. Tiring of the running battles with their competitors, Bridger and Fitzpatrick manipulated the American Fur brigade into an ambush by the Blackfeet, resulting in a number of deaths, including that of Vanderburgh's, John Jacob Astor's most valuable partisan in the Rockies. This, after shared drinks and camaraderie at the Rendezvous. The fur trade was literally a cutthroat business.

Present at every Rendezvous from 1833 to 1837 was the eccentric Sir William Drummond Stewart, Scottish baronet, world traveler, and veteran of Waterloo, who came west from St. Louis every spring with the trade caravan. Being an ex-military man who was a crack shot and a good hunter, he easily earned the respect of the mountain men he himself so admired.

Stewart's wealth enabled him to pursue almost no end of amusement and sport. Each year he brought fine cheeses, tinned meats, brandy, and champagne. To the 1837 meeting on Horse Creek of the Green River, he brought a suit of armor as a gift for Jim Bridger (thus attired, the legendary partisan spent a delightful afternoon drunk and charging around on his horse to the uproarious laughter of the assembled trappers and Indians). It was, in fact, Sir William Stewart who was ultimately responsible for DeVoto's book, for it was he who brought to the West Alfred Jacob Miller, the twenty-six-year-old Baltimore painter hired to accompany Stewart and sketch the 1837 Rendezvous.

The wanderings of Stewart and Miller form *Across the Wide Missouri*'s perfect

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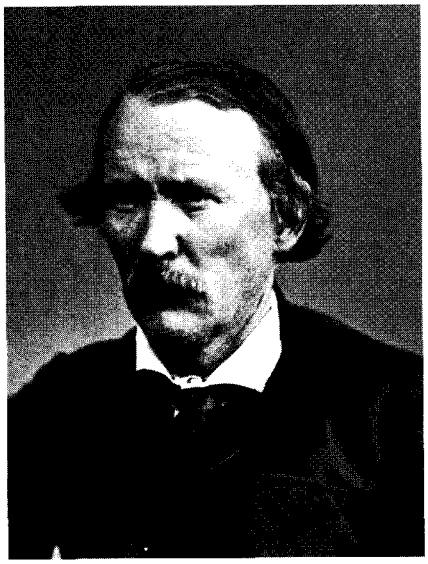

UPI / Corbis-Bettmann

Left: The old Kit Carson. Right: The young John Jacob Astor trading for beaver skins.

synecdoche. By that year the fur trade was in steep decline. Stiff competition, changing eastern fashions, and finally a dearth of beaver wreaked the trade (the last Rendezvous was held in 1839, a poor affair compared with its predecessors), and what business remained centered on fixed posts such as Fort Laramie, Astor's Fort Union on the Missouri, and Bent's fort on the Arkansas. Buffalo robes were more in demand than beaver skins.

The romantic West as depicted in Miller's paintings—the West of wild, primeval majesty—was fading. By the late 1830s, Protestant missionaries regularly accompanied the spring trade caravan to a Rendezvous—abhorring the fortnight or so of hedonistic debauchery—and then moved on with hired guides to the Oregon country. The era dominated by emigrants looking to settle, traveling what would soon be called the Oregon Trail, was beginning.

Though lacking the literary sparkle of *Across the Wide Missouri* and reading like a highbrow textbook, DeVoto's National Book Award-winning *The Course of Empire* provides a comprehensive look at the major explorations of the North American continent. Included are not only the standard portraits of Coronado, De Soto, Cartier, Champlain, Marquette, and La Salle, but the unknowns as well: the people DeVoto so admired, usually of small means and driven by self-interest, who did so much of the legwork. Gone is "History as Synecdoche" in this more expansive book as DeVoto drops his favorite device in favor of the full view, the results of his thorough and varied researches.

And yet, even here he could not entirely abandon his narrative device, and *The Course of Empire* revolves around the futile, three-hundred-year search for the mythical Northwest Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific. In 1634, for instance, at the behest of Samuel de Champlain, the trader Jean Nicolet arrived in a canoe on Green Bay on the western shore of Lake Michigan thinking he had landed in China, after hearing tales of a strange race that lived on the shore of a stinking sea.

The shore turned out to be the smelly mud flats of Green Bay, the race the fish-eating Winnebagos. Nicolet shook his head and shed his ceremonial robe of Chinese silk "all strewn with flowers and birds of many colors," put on his buckskins and proceeded up the Fox River to Lake Winnebago for further trade. Thus in 1634, the French reached all the way west to the 88th Meridian, while the English had reached no further than Concord, Massachusetts, a mere sixteen miles west of Boston. It was from well established bases on the Great Lakes that La Salle jumped off for his descent of the Mississippi half a century later.

With tales of the likes of Henry Kelsey, Pierre Vérendryre and his sons Louis Joseph and François, Anthony Henday, Samuel Hearne, and Alexander MacKenzie, DeVoto took delight in relating the hardships and wanderings of these mostly forgotten men. And the research required to uncover and record their obscure journeys in *The Course of Empire* was enormous.

During this decade of superb work in the late 1940s and early 1950s, DeVoto continued his miscellaneous journalism, especially his "Easy Chair" columns (a small career itself). Over forty of those columns were devoted to his beloved American West, the conservation of its resources, the state of its political climate, and—a subject close to his heart—the integrity of its National Parks. Historian, novelist, teacher, critic, editor: DeVoto left behind seventeen books and reams of uncollected journalism. He was a man of strong opinions and wasn't afraid to express them. His last great project was preparing the definitive edition of the journals of Lewis and Clark.

After his death from a heart attack, his ashes were scattered on the Lochsa River in Idaho's Clearwater National Forest at a place where he had enjoyed a 1950 camping trip. Nearby, a plaque reads: *In Memory of Bernard DeVoto, 1897-1955. Conservationist and Historian of the West.*

The plaque is hard bronze, affixed to a solid boulder, as lasting a monument as such things can be to the now-distant days when American historians still believed their work was to teach us about the strength of a distinctly American character—in the strength of a distinctly American prose. ♦

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SILICON FLOPS

Not Everyone Can Be Bill Gates

By David Skinner

Everyone's a sucker for a free baseball cap. Or a coffee mug. Which is why Silicon Valley salesmen aren't famous schmoozers: They don't need to paint the town red with their clients; almost anything with a corporate logo will do.

This curious fact and dozens more like it fill Po Bronson's new, non-fiction *The Nudist on the Late Shift and Other True Tales of Silicon Valley*. The busy world of high tech has a likable absence of cynicism, and Bronson describes it, in general, without suspicion. Con men and dirty dealers hover on the edges of this coming-of-age story about Silicon Valley, but they never interfere with Bronson's affection for the people of northern California's computer enclave.

PO BRONSON
The Nudist on the Late Shift and Other True Tales of Silicon Valley
Random House, 253 pp., $25

That marks a surprising turn for Bronson. His first novel, 1995's *Bombardiers*, was a deft satire of the bond-selling business and its often nonsensical system of risks and rewards. Bronson's second novel, 1997's *The First $20 Million Is Always the Hardest*, was a less interesting tale of a team of idealistic Silicon Valley go-getters. But at the center of both books is a seemingly inescapable trap.

In *Bombardiers*, the King of Mortgages, Sid Geeder, needs to keep meeting the increasingly insane quotas his boss sets for him so he can retire and cash in his company stock; but the company sets his quotas so high (far higher than anyone else's) that there is no way he can do it.

In *The First $20 Million*, characters struggle against "infinite loops," a term that refers to computer errors the computer doesn't register and so cannot adjust for. Infinite loops also refer to various pranks (some harmless, some not so) the novel's computer programmers play on the uninitiated to demonstrate their superiority. The entire plot turns on one programmer's successful effort to break an actual infinite computer loop, a trick that is worth millions.

The most significant difference between the two novels is that the hero of the first novel cannot beat life's peculiar logic traps, while the hero of the second novel can.

The forces over which the individual has no control in *Bombardiers*—capitalism's perversity, evil corporations, the American government's absurd bond issues—become in *The First $20 Million* the kind of force against which a good guy has a chance. And the only apparent cause of difference between the brilliant but tortured bond salesman of *Bombardiers* and the flexible and crafty hero of *The First $20 Million* is the magic Bronson finds in Silicon Valley.

Bronson is thus one of those people who, with the stock-market boom, seem to have been mugged by a happy reality. And in his *The Nudist on the Late Shift*, he demonstrates his continuing love—a little tempered, perhaps—for American business. Silicon Valley, you see, gives Po Bronson the chance to be on the side of the small heroes standing along against the system—and to go to a place where people are making a whole lot of money.

"My mom says instead of going to Hollywood to become an actress, I've come to Silicon Valley to be a ... a ... well, whatever grandiose term we might call it," says Julie, a saleswoman with the terrible job of calling around for new contacts.

But it isn't glamor that they come to Silicon Valley for; it's rather some inarticulate urge to be recognized as a person remaking the world, a serious person of death-denying commitment to the challenge of bringing great products to market. And as ridiculous as this superachiever ethos sounds, Bronson's enthusiasm is nevertheless contagious, at times leaving the reader with an incredible itch to drop everything and catch the next flight to San Jose.

Bronson's account of Silicon Valley is not so much a series of stories as a series of snapshots. And only a couple of his subjects can be considered very successful (Sabeer Bhatia, the founder of Hotmail, for instance) or very influential (George Gilder gets a chapter to himself).

All the others are minor programmers, venture capitalists, salesmen, promoters, drifters blown into town over the weekend, and immigrants looking for a share of American gold to take back to India or Indiana or wherever.

The whole book has the feel of studied incompleteness; it's the opposite of a saga: a collection of short stories about a variety of engaging characters. But, as far as literature about the computer industry goes, *The Nudist on the Late Shift* represents a tentative victory for the situation comedy over the mythical lore surrounding Bill Gates and other industry titans.

Make no mistake: Just because the people profiled in *The Nudist on the Late Shift* are diminutive doesn't mean they are without a mythic stature of their own. Danny Hillis, "the legendary designer of computer architecture," "is building a monument-sized mechani-

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cal clock that, if it is erected and started according to schedule on January 1, 2001," will count time through the year 12,000.

And there, in the midst of all the headhunters, software sellers, programmers, entrepreneurs, venture capitalists, and so on who make up Silicon Valley, sits the "cubicle guy," who buys, refurbishes, and sells used office cubicles. Businesses come and go so quickly that he's just raking in the cash.

Bronson says he wrote his book to remind the world of the "other pilgrims" who do not succeed. The savvy but desperate Steve Sellers and John Hanke, for example, who get the shaft when Snap, currently the fastest-growing search engine on the Internet, decides to go with a competitor's design for online games. Or Michael Zilly, who fails to find funding for his startup and falls in with a notorious swindler. Or Thierry Levy, a French entrepreneur who is stuck imagining the day when he can upgrade his diet from pasta that costs $1.59 to his favorite brand, which costs $2.59. By the book's end, one has gotten far more than a whiff of the little-guy sentimentality that is this book's main attraction and main conceit.

In the author's note for *The First $20 Million*, Bronson plays on the existence of "NOT gates." Like "AND gates" and "OR gates," "NOT gates" are fundamental logical transistors on which silicon computer chips are based. But they're also, of course, the "not Gates," those people in the computer world who never managed to succeed the way Bill Gates did. And writing about these have-nots, chronicling their lives, carries its own romantic temptation—where the failure to become a multimillionaire stands as proof of nobility.

But Bronson succeeds in turning these not-Gates into emblems of a particular place and time, Silicon Valley in the late 1990s. And even if *The Nudist on the Late Shift and Other True Tales of Silicon Valley* is occasionally guilty of false worship, its best stories and sharp vignettes are at least worth a free corporate baseball cap. Or a coffee mug. ♦

Do Manners Matter?

Mark Caldwell Defends Rudeness

By Lee Bockhorn

America has become schizophrenic about manners. By the millions we flock to scatological comedies, from the toilet-mouthed *South Park* to the masturbatory *American Pie*. And at the same time polls reveal that a huge majority believe American manners and morals have undergone a precipitous and deplorable decline. Eighty-nine percent of respondents to a 1996 *U.S. News & World Report* survey agreed that the nation is "basically uncivil."

Enter Mark Caldwell, a literary critic and social historian at Fordham University—a New York City school located in that heart of American manners, The Bronx. His new study, *A Short History of Rudeness*, isn't so much a discussion of "rudeness" as a rebuke of what he calls "jeremiads" on manners, from Christopher Lasch's 1979 *The Culture of Narcissism* to Gertrude Himmelfarb's 1995 *The De-Moralization of Society*. Believing that such books turn "optional niceties into duties in the hope that this will stiffen our moral spines," Caldwell sets out to discover whether manners are—or even should be—related to morals.

MARK CALDWELL
A Short History of Rudeness
Manners, Morals, and Misbehavior in Modern America
Picador, 243 pp., $23.

The answer he arrives at is, surprisingly, yes. Manners do touch upon morals, but the connection becomes "deceptive, sinuous, and complicated" in practice. Caldwell offers a variety of historical and anecdotal evidence for this view, the best example being political correctness. The attempt to bring propriety to race and gender relations, he notes, is often as inconsiderate as the behavior it seeks to avoid.

But from this correct (if somewhat obvious) point, he quickly overreaches, deciding that *all* efforts to stress manners are overbearing and ineffectual:

> The urge to inflate personal options into obligations is not a moral impulse but pushiness disguised as concern, whim masquerading as expertise. Behind it, however well it may be meant, lurks the urge to control, to punish, to make ourselves part of the "good" class . . . and to brand anyone who fails to conform as a Yahoo.

As Caldwell sees it, this "urge" serves the hypocritical purpose of a self-defined elite trying to distinguish itself from its ostensible lessers—defined as the boorish, the provincial, and the déclassé.

But while class distinctions are certainly important to the history of manners, they aren't the whole story. Victorians believed that branding the unmannered as "Yahoos" served a beneficial purpose: What nature fails to teach—to be kind, for instance—the threat of ostracism and ignominy may impart. More important, good manners can lead to higher virtues. Caldwell quotes Edmund Burke on this point:

> Manners are of more importance than laws. . . . [They] are what vex or soothe, corrupt or purify, exalt or debase, barbarize and refine us, by a constant, steady, uniform, insensible operation, like that of the air we breathe in. They give their whole form and colour to our lives. According to their quality, they aid morals, they supply them, or they totally destroy them.

Curiously, even while he criticizes those like Burke who connect manners to moral improvement, Caldwell ends up providing evidence to confirm them—as when he recounts a disturbing incident of "road rage" in which an innocent bystander was shot and left

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quadriplegic: "Indeed, a breakdown in manners can deteriorate into a confrontation where both morals and laws are violated. . . . Small morals aren't really small if they can tame the passions that lead to this kind of tragedy."

Caldwell's real objection isn't to the link between manners and morals, but to the idea that anyone has authority to tell us what that link is: "Everyone," he declares, "is qualified to contribute"—every man his own Emily Post. After all, didn't Diogenes the Cynic once use inspired rudeness to mock the pretensions of the Athenians? And aren't William Bennett and the other modern promoters of good manners really closet authoritarians, against whom rudeness is our best defense?

What people like Bennett, Lasch, and Himmelfarb do is exploit the American desire "for stable and rock-solid values." "But," Caldwell insists, "values are always somebody's values, and somebody else, perhaps equally worthy and well-meaning, may hold other, very different ones." That isn't true, of course; people in fact hold surprisingly consistent values across the board. But even if it were true, what Caldwell has in fact identified is merely the local variations of manners, not values: The fact that a man is supposed to uncover his head in a church and cover it in a synagogue reveals varying manners and an unvarying ideal of *well-manneredness*.

Perhaps the worst failing of *A Short History of Rudeness* is Caldwell's ignorance of the effect America's endless litigation has had on manners and civility. When every difference between individuals becomes potential grounds for a lawsuit, should we be surprised that we have a ruder culture? Incredibly, Caldwell never addresses this important issue, perhaps because it undermines his claim that today's manners crisis is just the latest in a continually recurring cycle. The present ebb in civility has unique causes—such as the rejection of authority and community norms in the 1960s—and requires an equally drastic response. Athens only had to deal with the public-spirited Diogenes; we must cope with Dennis Rodman.

The topic of manners presents difficult terrain, stretching from Miss Manners to *Beavis and Butt-head*. By and large, Caldwell proves equal to this task. He is engaging on many subjects, from Martha Stewart to funerals to cyberspace sludge. However, while *A Short History of Rudeness* can be entertaining and informative, it doesn't answer the most important question: How can America, a mobile and egalitarian society whose manners are in constant flux, restore its sense of civility?

In his discussion of manners on the Internet, Caldwell comes tantalizingly close to the answer:

> Some innate and unconscious human law seems to conserve [manners], even against the odds. As the Internet has already begun to demonstrate, even a social space created with conscious lawlessness quickly demonstrates a need for order and generates a rough code of manners.

Just what is this "innate and unconscious human law" that can explain the "complicated" link between manners and moral duty? Perhaps it's really not that complicated after all: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."

The golden rule is, after all, a fundamental tenet of most religions and something every six-year-old innately understands. It may not transport us back to a golden age of manners and mores. But adherence to it in small matters might go a long way towards solving our newer, more pressing problems—like people shooting each other over fender-benders. ♦

Every Man His Own Critic

The Culture of Amazon.com

By Tracy Lee Simmons

So you want to buy a book. Maybe you're too busy to stop off at the local bookshop. There's a funny moment in Helene Hanff's *84 Charing Cross Road*, the charming 1970 collection of letters between a New York writer and the London bookstore manager from whom she would order books by mail, in which Hanff explains that England only *seems* a long way from lower Manhattan; in fact, walking to the mailbox is a lot easier than trekking all the way uptown to Barnes & Noble.

Or maybe you're not even sure which book you want. So you boot up your computer, dial in to your Internet provider, and connect to Amazon.com—the book-selling Web site that claims to have "Earth's Biggest Selection." It's there on the welcome screen that you'll see a list of the current "Hot Books," on which you can find a novel you've vaguely heard of but never got around to reading: Arthur S. Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*, now out in paperback, for example.

But that's not all. Click your mouse on the selection, and a posse of readers waits to advise you on your choice. Bookstore clerks can't do this for you anymore, so why should you walk all the way down to your local Borders? One of the readers who has helpfully posted his thoughts on Amazon explains that Golden "uses an incredible amount of metaphors, adjectives, and can never just describe something the easy way." Fancy that from a novelist.

Another reader feels that there "needs to be a better way to learn about [a] geisha" than plowing through this book. Yes, there probably does. You've been saved.

Here's a sign of the times. Click on an Internet search for the number of

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sites bearing some earthly link to "opinion," and watch your results to the tune of 1,129,942 hits, give or take a few thousand. Everyone wants to know: "What do you think?"

And we find a fair index to this faith in the critical acumen of the American Everyman in the chatty precincts of the review pages of Amazon.com, the Internet bookstore whose convenience has already altered the purchasing habits of book buyers. By the beginning of this year, Amazon had three million titles in its catalogue, along with 125,000 CDs, figures to strike fear into the hearts of retailers everywhere.

Of course, some unconnected Luddites still complain that electronic commerce isn't like browsing in an actual store. But Amazon is not to be outdone. We can in fact browse, and talk to others, in a manner of speaking, just as though we were cruising the aisles at Barnes & Noble. But there's an even greater innovation: a people's republic of book reviewing.

Here's how it works. If you've done business with Amazon before, you're greeted by name—still a little eerie, if you're not used to it. Even before you can ask for a selection, Amazon reports it has some "recommendations" tailored just for you, a reading list that the great cranium has constructed by cogitating on your past purchases. (When I click on mine, I discover Amazon has a decently high estimation of me. They think I'll enjoy *Poor Richard's Almanack*, *A Century of Arts & Letters*, *New World Symphonies: How American Culture Changed European Music*, and *The Oxford Book of Comic Verse*. They also think I'll take a shine to something called *Being Digital*. I'm sure it's a fine book, but I can't imagine what I did to deserve it.)

When you click on one of these book titles to call up the essentials of price and availability, you're also treated to a list entitled "Customers who bought this book also bought . . . ," an up-sell bid to make sure we don't miss out on all the related goodies we weren't smart enough to recognize before. Smoothly written review summaries and plot synopses (from *Kirkus Reviews*, for instance) are provided for the more popular titles, affording the barest information about the book, often mincingly worded for commercial effect.

Then comes the treat: "Customer Comments," the online reviews from fellow readers. You can't scroll these pages without a certain fresh optimism as common, nonprofessional voices speak within a large and open forum, blithely unencumbered by editorial midwives, able at last to shout and be heard. They're like birds freed from a cage, and it's only with difficulty that you escape the feeling that far too many Americans have far too much time on their hands.

You might suppose that this liberation from the exclusions of the "media elite" would encourage flights of freethinking. But the average reviewer ends up trying to sound like the media elite. John Grisham has a ready-made fan club for his latest legal-mystery best-seller, *The Testament*. One reader gushes that this is "not his usual New Orleans based novel, but wow!!! What a great book. . . . I finished the book in three days, I couldn't put it down. You can't go wrong with this book." Another chimes in: "The story itself is just great: Money, hatred, love, religion, . . . everything is involved. A great book worth reading, John Grisham has done it again!!!!!!!" (F. Scott Fitzgerald once said that using exclamation marks is like laughing at your own jokes—which, come to think of it, most of us do these days.) Although not professionals, the Amazon readers strain to compose professional-sounding blurbs: "Highly recommended." "I can't recommend it highly enough." "One of Grisham's Best." They could be written in neon.

DAVID LEHMAN'S STUDY OF THE NEW YORK POETS "GAVE ME STRENGTH," A READER DECLARES. IT ISN'T A BOOK SO MUCH AS A THERAPEUTIC EXPERIENCE.

And then there's another category of comment where we get freethinking with a vengeance: the niggling grouch. One example will do—you know this guy; you sat next to him in high school. Pronouncing Grisham's latest "boring," he explains that the book was "written for a reader with below-average intelligence or reading skills, the characters . . . are flat and boring, it's WAY too long." He continues: "If I'm reading a book I really like, I'll finish it in a few days. But this book took me almost a month, not because it's hard, but because it almost felt like a chore. . . . Don't waste your time."

It's true that, along with all the slim or clumsily malicious reviews, you can occasionally find sensible voices on Amazon. Responding to complaints that Michael Ondaatje's historical novel *The English Patient* isn't historical enough, one reader balked:

> I am amazed by the amateur "critics." . . . Did they fail to see the lyric language and full, beautiful characters? If every novel was written with immaculate historical content, it would be non-fiction; perhaps people should review the definitions of fiction and literature so that they might appreciate this book (and the author!) for the beauty and brilliance they capture.

You might disagree with this particular reader's critical assessment (as I do), but at least this is the stuff of discussion. Such equitable voices are not so scarce among the Amazon reviews, but their presence beside the more careless, not to say imbecilic, ones does create a dissonance that will leave the thoughtful book buyer unwilling to wade into the swamp.

Authors can leave messages on Amazon's cosmic bulletin board as well; in fact, they're strongly encouraged to, with a special clickable option on every book's page reading "I am the Author, and I want to comment on my book." There's a competition that's emerged in the publishing circles of New York and Washington that involves comparing the "Amazon.com Sales Rank" that the Web site cruelly provides for each book it sells. Does Wendy Shalit's attack on the modern condition of women, *A*

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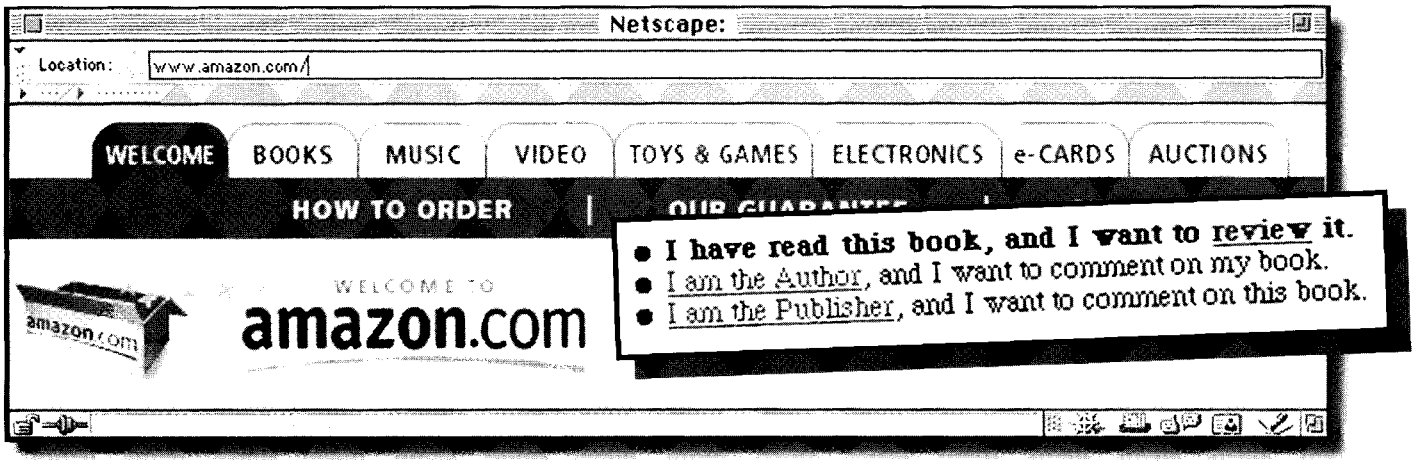

Return to Modesty, currently have an "Amazon.com Sales Rank" of 7,352? Well, Danielle Crittenden's *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us* is at 3,292. (The game ceases to be much fun when you reach the sales level of books like Grisham's *The Testament*, now at 31.)

But though they may sign on to get their latest sales rank, authors seem for the most part to have resisted the temptation to post messages about their books. It's like writing to a magazine to complain about a review of your book: There's almost no way to do it without sounding ridiculous. Click on Amazon's entry for *The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Fantasy*—where you'll find an author's message that begins, "In reply to the reader from Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, who complained that my book couldn't be much good"—and you can only cringe.

And then there's this nugget from the author of a new edition of Dante: "In 1957 C.S. Lewis read my thesis about him and congratulated me, . . . 'I hope we shall have some really useful critical works from your hand.' With [my latest translation], Lewis's hope seems to be fulfilled." Her own book, she concludes, is "the clearest, most accurate, and most readable edition" of Dante "ever published in English."

Amazon does provide snippets from the book journals and published reviews to help readers. David Lehman, impresario to contemporary American poets as general editor of the *Best American Poetry* series, published a work last year that has met with some acclaim, *The Last Avant-Garde: The Making of the New York School of Poets*, an examination of the combo of John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, Kenneth Koch, and James Schuyler, four poets who bestrode the American literary landscape from the 1940s to the 1960s. After a long and helpful summary of the book, Amazon follows up with a couple selections from the press. David Yezzi of the *New York Times Book Review* asserts that Lehman "has a spirited story to tell and he tells it with spirit," a professional blurb seemingly calculated for its uselessness. *Booklist* tells us that "*this* is how to write about poetry." We also learn that the poets of the New York School were "playful, irreverent, tradition-shattering, and brilliant," the last word ostensibly summing up the other three.

But then Amazon turns to the customer reviews—and we walk through the looking glass. "Disregard carping snob academics. This book is the real goods," writes someone from Brooklyn, ending with the obligatory "Highly recommended." But another fellow, tagging himself a Ph.D. lest we think him just another Gitane-smoking bohemian, writes cryptically, "Again, Mr. Lehman infests our shelves w/ less Apollonious [sic] than should be allowed. That is the effect when a writer of a few Spenserian means tackles subjects, heroes, beyond his artistic mettle." Another reader explains that Lehman's *The Last Avant-Garde* evokes "art"—"art as savage as a lion in the living room or a tiger on the fire escape."

But we haven't reached Ultima Thule yet. Another reviewer, whose motives for writing transcend any we could credit in a sober moment, holds forth:

> You just can't put [this book] down, simply because you can't have enough of the drama and color of a period when poetry walked barefoot with a hard-on. One really feels like taking the next flight to The Big Apple and hunkering down to a cold pint and cigarettes in a dive with the windows steamed over with blue smoke. Today's poetic scenario stops looking like a dry dog turd on the road; possibilities heat up in you, hands seeking the comfort of paint squeezed from a tube.

"You feel," he decides, "like painting, writing, sculpting, even turning gay ALL IN THE SAME DAMNED SITTING (no pun intended)." (None taken.) Amazon says it scans these reviews for content and propriety, but the Web site's criteria are anybody's guess. The reader concludes: "Buy this book if you want a miracle—it gave me strength in a period when everything hurt." Well, who could object to that? This isn't a book so much as a therapeutic experience.

The critic Joseph Epstein once defined a good book review as simply an interesting mind reading a book, which sounds cloying until you ponder it. Some of the minds on Amazon are certainly "interesting," but perhaps not in quite the way Epstein meant. It helps if a little authority and competence, not to mention sobriety, get thrown into the mix.

Amazon.com has at last provided America with the true democratic forum to talk about books—a world where everyone's a critic and all voices are equal. And mostly what it shows is the fragility and frequent worthlessness of opinion. T.S. Eliot once claimed that the purpose of criticism was "the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste." In our gabby age, elucidation and correction are the first to be sucked down into the mud of opinion. And with "Earth's Largest Selection," Amazon.com makes the perfect bog. ♦

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Hillary Clinton implies that her husband's philandering ways may have grown out of the tensions he faced as a boy as a result of vicious feuding between his mother and grandmother.
—News item

Parody

The Man from Hot Springs

by Tennessee Williams

Scene 1

Setting: A shabby split-level house in Hot Springs, Arkansas. The furniture is ripped and dirty. The floor is strewn with whiskey jugs and old pizza boxes.

(Billy-Boy enters wearing an Elvis wig and carrying a banjo.)

Billy-Boy: Maw . . . the delivery man is here with the roast squirrel pizza pie you ordered.

(Maw appears at the top of the stairs, stage right.)

Maw: Thanks, Billy-Boy. You send him on up, and don't bother us for half an hour.

(Grandma enters, stage left.)

Grandma: Ginny-Jo, you have got to stop fooling around with every pizza man who comes by.

Maw *(wagging finger)*: Now you listen to me! I want to make this clear. I did not fool around with that last delivery man, Mr. Jefferson!

Grandma: You an unusually good liar, Ginny-Jo!

Maw: Billy, if someone is ever nice enough to bring you a pizza someday, I hope you will show some consideration in return.

Billy-Boy: Yes, Maw.

Grandma: Don't you listen to her, Billy. What you need to do is marry one of those ambitious girls from up north, the kind that would run over your poor dead grandmother if it would help her get ahead. Promise me you'll marry a girl like that.

Billy-Boy: Sure, Grams.

Maw: Personally, I have always relied on the kindness of strangers . . . them and State Troopers of course.

Grandma *(whispering)*: Say it, Billy. Say our phrase.

Billy-Boy: Aw, Grams, I don't feel like it.

Grandma: Say it, Billy. I want you to always be saying it. Say it now.

Billy-Boy *(mumbling)*: We'll just have to win, then.

Grandma: Say it louder Billy. I can't hear you. Say it louder!

Billy-Boy *(shouting)*: We'll just have to win, then!

Grandma: Hallelujah!

(Curtain)

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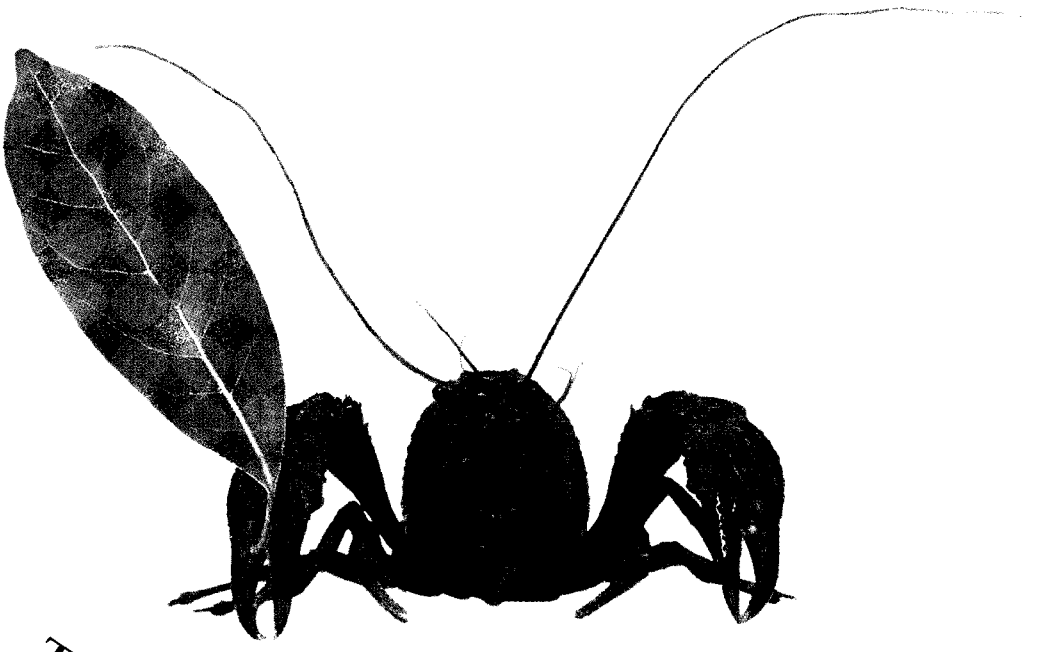
"More than 200 years ago, French-speaking settlers were forced to leave their land of Acadie, which the British had taken over and renamed Nova Scotia, and make their way to the wetlands of southern Louisiana. Here, without much notice, they built steep-roofed houses to slough off nonexistent snow and **adapted French cuisine to the crawfish** and muskrat they found in abundance in the pelican-tended swamps." — *The Almanac of American Politics 2000* on Louisiana's Congressional District 7.



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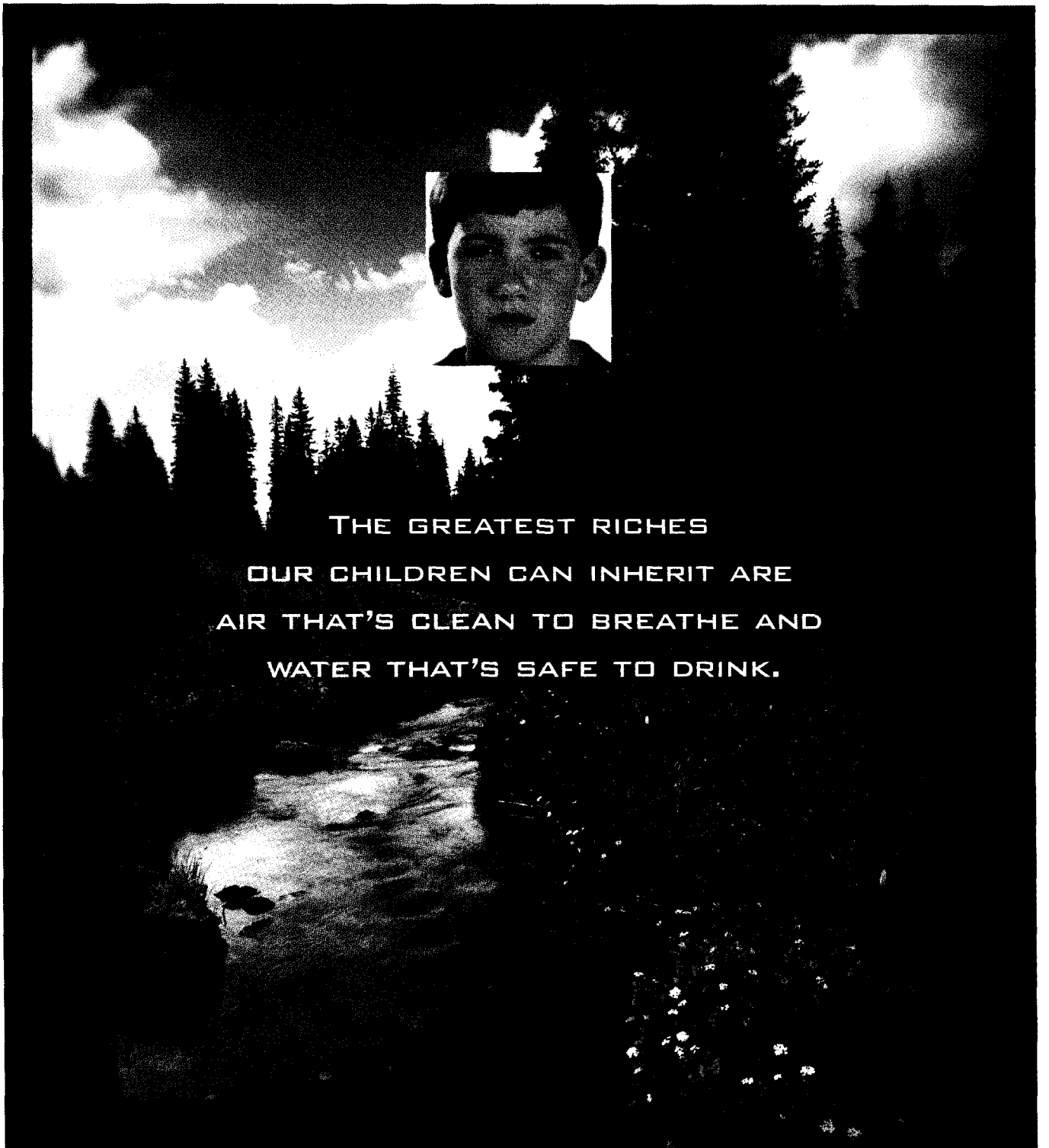

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